

11. The Throne of Grace in heaven

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The old mountaineer had lived a full but not exactly saintly life and now was on his deathbed. He summoned his weeping wife. "Sara," he said, "go to the fireplace and take out the third stone from the top right." She did as instructed. "Reach in there," said her husband, "and bring out what you find."

Her fingers touched a large mason jar, and with some effort she pulled it up. The jar was full of cash. "Sara," said the old man, "when I go, I'm going to take all that money with me. I want you to put that jar up in the attic by the window. I'll get it as I go by on my way to heaven."

His wife followed his instructions faithfully. That night the old mountaineer died. After the funeral his wife remembered the mason jar and went to the attic. There was the jar still full of money and by the window. "Oh," the widow sighed. "I knew I should have put it in the basement."

A Gallup poll showed that 78 percent of Americans expect to go to heaven when they die. However, many of them don't know that receiving Jesus Christ as the Savior and Lord into one's heart is the only way get to heaven.

Many people have not only wrong concept about heaven, but they also think that it is a rather boring place. They say, "Oh yeah, you can get excited about being in heaven for some time. But after all that initial excitement is over, what are you going to do? Laying around on the clouds and playing a harp for the rest of eternal life? And watching fat naked baby angels with tiny wings floating around?" That is exactly what the devil want you to believe about heaven.

But from what I've read about heaven in the Bible, heaven is filled with adoration, worship, ecstasy, love for God and His saints and more worship to the Lamb of God. It looks like there is not one dull moment.

We are going to have a glimpse of heaven for next couple of Sundays.

A. RIGHT AFTER THE RAPTURE

Rev. 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

True spiritual worship is perhaps one of the greatest needs in our individual lives and in our churches. There is a constant emphasis today on witnessing for Christ and working for Christ, but not enough is said about worshiping Him. To worship means "to ascribe worth". It means to use all that we are and have to praise God for all that He is and does.

Heaven is a place of worship, and God's people shall worship Him throughout all eternity. Perhaps it would be good for us to get in practice now! A study of Revelation 4 & 5 will certainly help us better understand how to worship God and give Him the glory that He deserves.

In the description of heavenly things, Apostle John uses a lots of symbols. However, not everything is symbolic. We should keep in mind the nature of symbolism: the symbol is always less than the reality. The reality of heaven is even greater than the description we have of it.

The words used by Apostle John could not describe the complete beauty of our God. We all realize that we are limited in description as well as in understanding.

“After these things” what? After chapters 2 and 3 – after church history. I find it interesting that in the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation, the word “church” appears nineteen times. From chapter 4 on, however, it never appears. Why? Because in chapter 4, the church is taken off the scene and into heaven.

B. AT THE THRONE OF GRACE

Rev. 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

The key word in this chapter is ‘throne’. It is used fourteen times. In fact, this is one of the key words in the entire book, appearing forty-six times. No matter what may happen on earth, God is on His throne and He is in complete control. Apostle John is emphasizing the glory and sovereignty of God.

This throne is what first got Apostle John’s attention, and it is the centerpiece of this vision. John is fixated on the occupied throne, and everything else is described in relation to this throne.

Apostle John saw who was on the Throne of Grace. That brings four things to our attention:

- 1) If you’re worshiping at the altar of materialism, you get the house or buy the car and worship there for a week or two, a year or ten – but then it doesn’t work anymore. You have to have a newer house or better car. So you move or buy newer car.
- 2) If you’re worshiping at the altar of sensuality, you worship there for a while – until that altar doesn’t work anymore and you have to find someone else.
- 3) If you worship at the altar of intellectualism and immerse yourself in the study of this philosophy or that concept, a month or a year later, you’re bored with it.
- 4) If you worship at the altar of yourself, nothing in this world would make you happy. They may make you feel good for awhile. But always discontent.

That’s why we live in a culture that says, “Been there, done that, now what?” Not so with the Lord. I’ve been walking with Him for seventeen years, and I’m not at all bored. My relationship with Him just gets better and more exciting, more challenging and more intriguing, because His Throne is set in my heart.

Rev. 4:3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

Jasper is a clear gem, probably a diamond and the sardius is red ruby. This rainbow was a complete circle, not merely an arc, because in heaven all things are completed. The rainbow is reminiscent of God’s promise never again to judge

the earth by a flood according to Gen 9:8-17. As He promised, He will not use flood to deal with the unbelieving people during the Tribulation.

Judgment is about to fall, but the rainbow reminds us that God is merciful, even when He judges. Usually, a rainbow appears after the storm; but here, we see it before the storm.

This description of the heaven of God in this Book makes the New York 5th Avenue Tiffany Jewelry store look like nothing.

Rev. 4:4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

Who are these twenty-four elders? Commentators debate whether they are glorified human beings or angelic beings. On balance, they certainly seem to represent God's people. The 12 tribes from the OT and the 12 apostles from the NT represent all the faithful people of God.

Angels are sometimes presented in white robes or garments, but saints also have white robes as a picture of their imputed righteousness. However, we never see angels crowned, but believers are and will be.

So, redeemed, glorified born-again believer sits enthroned with Jesus. On lesser thrones, of course, but thrones none the less. We are joint heirs with Christ, and we will reign with Him.

Rev. 4:5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

If you are thinking, "Why waste time on this heavenly Throne of Grace? Let's get to the juicy parts of the Great Tribulation," you are missing the whole point of the Book of Revelation. This apocalypse book is not just to see what is going to happen on the earth or to find out who the antichrist is, but to have revelation of Jesus Christ and to know Him more intimately.

Besides, this is what you are going to see for the rest of your eternal life in heaven if you are a born-again Christian. You might as well get used to it.

Lightnings and thunders are indications of a coming storm and reminders of God's awesome power.

Our world does not like to think of God as a God of judgment, but only a God of love. 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 and love, but His grace reigns through righteousness. This was made clear at the cross where God manifested both His love for sinners and His wrath against sin.

Seven Spirits of God as represented by seven lamps presents the completeness of the seven fold character of the Holy Spirit. The seven fold character was shown in the study of the seven churches in chapter 2 & 3 of this book.

C. THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

Rev. 4:6-8 Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

Around the throne, John saw four "living creatures" who were nearer to God than the angels and the elders. They resemble the cherubim that the Prophet Ezekiel saw, but their praise reminds us of the seraphim of Isaiah 6. The KJV translates 'creatures' as 'beasts' which is an incorrect translation.

These creatures signify the wisdom of God – "full of eyes" – and proclaim the holiness of God.

Many Bible scholars see in the four faces described an illustration of the fourfold picture of Christ given in the Gospel accounts. Matthew is the royal Gospel of the King, illustrated by the lion. Mark emphasizes the servant aspect of the Lord's ministry as the calf. Luke presents Christ as the compassionate Son of man. John magnifies the deity of Christ, the Son of God as the eagle.

We studied about the Tabernacle from the OT that coincide with this study rather intensively for the last couple of the Midweek Bible Studies. If you'd like to do more in-depth study for this subject, you can get CDs from the Bookstore or listen or download the sermon notes from our church web site.

In Hebrew language, the double repetition of a word adds emphasis, while the rare threefold repetition designates the superlative and calls attention to the infinite holiness of God.

D. PRAISE TO THE THRONE OF GOD

Rev. 4:9-11 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

If the twenty-four elders typify the people of God in heaven, then we must ask, "Why should God's people praise God the Creator?" If the heavens are declaring the glory of God, why shouldn't God's heavenly people join the chorus? Creation bears constant witness to the power, wisdom, and glory of God. Acknowledging the Creator is the first step toward trusting the Redeemer.

But sinful man worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator, and this is idolatry. It is unfortunate that the church today often neglects to worship the God of all creation.

The Emperor of Rome ruled over many lesser kings, and these kings were at time commanded to come before the Emperor and lay their crowns down before him in homage. Then he would give them back, as a demonstration that their crowns, their right to rule, their victory, came from him.

Our text says they all cast their crowns before the throne. There are no divided opinions in heaven or no denominations. They are all in perfect harmony.

The twenty four elders are acknowledging the complete sovereignty of Jesus Christ as a Person of the Triune Godhead that He has all rights and claims over everything - even as a potter has all rights and claims over the clay.

Romans 9:21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

When we worship our God in spirit and truth, three important things will happen in our lives:

1) True worship removes fear from our heart, because God fills our hearts with His joy and love.

2) True worship helps us acknowledge who God is.

3) True worship makes us to be grateful for what He has done for us in our lives.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) We need to ask ourselves who is on the throne of our heart.

Is Jesus in the throne of our heart? Or is yourself sitting on that throne? If it is yourself on the throne, NOW is a good time to dethrone yourself. The throne of your heart and mine belong to Jesus.

2) We must remember that our God is certainly a God of grace and love, but His grace reigns through righteousness.

Yes, our God forgives and forgets our sins when they are confessed to Him. But let's make no mistake about it. For the continuing sins and self-excused sins in our lives, He will deal with us with His righteousness because He is a just, righteous and holy God.

3) Worship done to our God in spirit and truth will lift us up from our own fear for the situations around us, and make us to acknowledge who God is and make us to be grateful for what He has done in our lives.