

God is on the Throne

Revelation 4:1-11

Please stand and open your Bibles to the book of Revelation 4:1-11 [READ/Pray]. I have entitled this message: God is on the Throne:

Introduction:

The late Dr. Calvin Miller who once taught preaching at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, shared an occasion prior to his professorship of when he pastored a church in Omaha, Nebraska. During that pastorate he talked with a new Christian about the glory of heaven. The man asked, “What are we going to do all day long for eternity?” Dr. Miller replied, “We’ll praise the Lord.” The new disciple responded, “Forever – for ten million years – we’re going to stand around and praise the Lord? The pastor affirmed this truth, to which the young man responded, “Couldn’t we just stop now and then and mess around a while?”

The worship of heaven is not as exciting to those of us who are not tired of living in this life. The enjoyment of our sinful idols makes living in a fallen world more appealing than living in a perfect world. Plus, the thought of heaven being like the typical worship services that take place week after week can be more of a nightmare than a dream. To just be singing for all eternity without nothing else to do is to height of boredom if heaven is anything like what we experience each week at church. But despite anything we may have experienced in church worship service, the fact of the matter is, it is only the holy man or holy woman who love God, who is tired of the sin in them, who is tired of the sin around them and who longs for troubles no more that can truly look forward to spending eternity worshiping God in heaven.

[It's like the account of two Christians who lived very healthy lives. When they died, they went to heaven. As they walked along, marveling at the paradise around them, one of the men turned to the other and said, "Wow. I never imagined heaven would be good as this!" "Yeah," agreed the other. "And just think, if we hadn't eaten all that oat bran we could have gotten here ten years sooner.""]

So as we return to the book of Revelation we come to the third part of a three part outline of this book. In Revelation 1:19, the apostle John who is imprisoned on the island of Patmos receives a vision on a Sunday morning of the glorified and exalted Lord Jesus Christ who commands him to write: 1] "the things which you have seen" – this refers to the first vision John sees as he describes the glory of the risen and exalted Christ [1:12-18]; 2] "and the things which are", which refers to the seven churches in Asia Minor in chaps. 2-3. The description of these seven literal and historical churches are characteristic of all churches throughout church history. Seven is the number of completion. This is a complete description of all churches. And what Jesus says to these churches is what the Spirit is saying to all churches; 3] "and the things which shall take place after these things" – this takes us from chaps. 4-22 of the book of Revelation, the events that will take place after the church age. This third vision is the largest section in the book.

As we come to chapter 4, we are given a vision of heaven in two chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on God the Father as the Sovereign and Holy Creator. Chapter 5 focuses on God the Son as the Omnipotent and Omnipresent Redeemer.

Exposition:

So you will notice in our bulletin this morning there is an outline. And for our time this morning I want to give you: 2 mental pictures from this heavenly vision that is meant to radically change how we view the world around us:

The 1st mental picture from this heavenly vision that is meant to radically change how we view the world around us is: God is always on the throne controlling every aspect of life for His glory [vv. 1-6]

[1] 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.”

“After these things” [meta tauta – neuter accus. plural] the church age as described in chapters 2-3; “I looked” [eidon – aorist indicative active; 1st person singular]; “and behold” [exclamation]; “a door standing open in heaven” [open – anoigo – to open; perfect participle; passive voice; fem. accus. singular]; Grace is realizing that there’s a door in heaven that stands open since the time of Christ’s atoning death for all those who trust in Him. It will stay open until all the ransomed sons of God come to glory.

“and the first voice which I had heard” [heard – akouo – aorist indicative active; 1st person singular]; “like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me” – “speaking” [laleo – present participle active; fem. genitive singular]; In Rev. 1:10, it says that John heard a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet. That trumpet speaking sound was the Lord Jesus Christ. The trumpet sounding voice in Rev. 4:1 is the Lord Jesus Christ again. “said” [legon – present participle active; nom. masc. singular]; “Come up here” – “Come up” [anabaino – aorist imperative active; 2nd person singular –

aojist tense denotes urgency]; “and I will show you” – “show” [deiknuo – future indicative active; 1st person singular]; “what must take place after these things” – “must” [dei – present indicative active; 1st person singular; it is necessary]; “after these things” [meta tauta]

It’s important that right after seeing the state of seven churches of Asia Minor, that only two out of the seven were living faithfully before the Lord. That five of them were compromising with sin, tolerating sin, spiritually dead and apostate. Seeing that as an apostle, knowing that the truth had been brought to these congregations and seeing them drift at the close of the first century can be very discouraging, especially while being imprisoned on the island of Patmos for the gospel. There is nothing as disappointing as suffering for what you know to be right only to feel like it really didn’t matter in the end. There is nothing as depressing as spending your life seeking to honor the Lord by doing His will and it seems to be pointless because there hadn’t been any fruit from it. But in the midst of discouragement, disappointment and depression a command is issued to John to “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” In other words, it’s not over yet. Don’t throw in the towel as if all was for nothing. What we see happening in the churches today and in this world is not the final story. There is something that is about to happen after these things. “After these things” refer to after the church age.

[2] Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

“Immediately” [eutheos – adv.]; “I was in the Spirit” – “was” [ginomai – to become; aorist indicative passive 1st person singular]; **Quote:** “When a person is ‘in the Spirit’ and being in that state has a vision, there is a suspension of

conscious contact with the physical environment” – Hendriksen.

“and behold” [exclamation], “a throne was standing in heaven” – “a throne” [13 times in 11 verses of this chapter the word “throne” or “thrones” is mentioned. This is the central focus and theme of this chapter. Thank God for the Holy Spirit. In this vision, the Holy Spirit must direct John’s vision so that he doesn’t miss what is most important. See, if it was us directing this vision we would get caught up in the streets of gold, the mansions, the pearly white gates, being reunited with our loved ones but none of those things as good and exciting as they are cannot compare with seeing the One who reigns on the throne. That’s what we need to see.

John doesn’t ever describe the facial features of the One who is sitting on the throne. Does He resemble The Creation of Adam painting by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? Does He have a white beard? All of this is ill-relevant when your heart needs to be encouraged. Everything is to be viewed, explained and understood from the aspect of the throne. Everything in heaven is centered on the throne. The first look of heaven in the book of Revelation, the first description of heaven in the Bible is the throne;

Script. Ref: Isa. 66:1 – Thus says the Lord, “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool”; Matt. 5:34 – But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God”; Matt. 23:22 – “And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

Listen, heaven is just another way of saying the throne of God. Heaven and God’s throne are synonymously in Scripture.

“was standing” [keimai – to stand; imperfect indicative passive voice; 3rd person singular; progressive imperfect of duration – the process as having gone on in the past time up to the time denoted by the context];

“and One sitting on the throne” – “sitting” [kathemai – present participle middle voice; nom. masc. singular – “and One Himself sitting on the throne”]; God sitting on the throne is meant for us to understand that God is not resting on the throne, He is not lounging on the throne but that He is reigning from the throne.

Our hearts ought to be encouraged, our emotions ought to be stirred that despite what seems to be chaotic, disturbing, fearful, out of control, discouraging and hopeless in this world, yet when we turn our eyes towards heaven the truth of the matter is God is on the throne. Yet despite, what I am going through right now, God has not abandoned His position of authority over my circumstances. God still sits on the throne. The devil is not sitting on the throne, our president is not sitting on the throne. My problems are not sitting on the throne. But my God is sitting on the throne. Behold a throne was standing in heaven.

[3] 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 He who was sitting” [sitting – kathemai – to sit down; present participle middle voice; nom. masc. singular; articular participle – the One who was sitting]; “was like a jasper stone” [iaspis – jasper – the ancient stone must have been translucent rock crystal, possibly a diamond. [Thomas]; “and sardius in appearance” [sardion – “sardius stone” – this was a blood-red stone said to be named after Sardis, and one of the most commonly used gems in the ancient world. [Linguistic and Exegetical key to the Greek NT]]; The white diamond color of jasper along with the

reddish color of sardius pictures God as both holy [white] and righteous [red]. God choose to manifest His glory as precious jewels in order to convey to us that our God who is on the throne is expensive. He is no cheap God. He cannot be bought or bribed. He is valuable, priceless. No creature can own Him. No creature cannot afford Him. He is the most valuable being in all the universe. Nothing in all the universe is as beautiful as the glory of God.

“and there was a rainbow around the throne” – “rainbow” [iris – used only twice in the NT; here and Rev. 10:1]; reminds us of God’s covenant promise to creation to never flood the world again. God is faithful; “around” [kuklothen – adv. round about; all round]; “like an emerald in appearance” – “emerald” [smaragdino – used only here in the NT]; The green colored rainbow speaks of God’s faithfulness to His promises. Green is the color that represents new life, renewal, freshness. This is the goal of all that is about to take place. A new heavens and a new earth.

Because the God who sits on the throne is glorious, this means that everything that issues forth from this throne is glorious from heaven’s perspective. Listen, accidents don’t govern the universe, happenstance doesn’t govern the universe, fate doesn’t govern the universe, karma doesn’t govern the universe, only a personal, sovereign God governs the universe.

[4] Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones” – lit. And all around the throne, twenty-four thrones; [“The mental image we receive of the twenty-four thrones is that of a square with God’s throne in the center and six thrones on each side”

of that square”. [Kistemaker]; “In the Bible twelve appears to be the number of divine government – twelve months in a lunar year, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles, twelve gates in the New Jerusalem, twelve angels at each gate, twelve foundation... Multiples of twelve such as twenty four probably have a similar significance. [Expositor’s Bible Commentary]; “and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting” – “sitting” [kathemai – present participle middle/passive; accus. masc. plural]; “clothed in white garments” [clothed – peri-ballo – perfect participle passive voice; accus. masc. plural; same Greek word used in Rev. 3:5, 18]; “and golden crowns on their heads” – “crowns” [stephanous – same used in Rev. 3:11 – “I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown/stephanos]

Angels are never called “elders” in the Bible. They are never spoken of as wearing crowns or sitting on thrones even though they have been delegated positions of authority. The near context in Revelation, particularly the previous chapters of 2-3 would clarify for us that those who are on the throne are the overcomers of the seven churches who were promised that if they overcame they would be “clothed in white garments” [3:5] and that they would receive a crown [2:10; 3:11]. And they were promised that they would sit down on thrones [3:21]... These 24 elders are not a complete representation of the people of God but merely representative of overcomers of both the OT saints and NT church. There are twelve tribes of Israel [Old Covenant] and the twelve apostles who are the foundation of the church [Eph. 2:20]. [The traditional interpretation of the twenty-four elders is that this number is the total of twelve times two, namely twelve OT patriarchs and twelve NT apostles, the representatives of those redeemed by Christ. [Kistemaker].

These 24 overcomers ought to remind us this morning that whatever it is that you are going through or anticipate going through that in the end you will be victorious as you keep trusting in the Lord. He will bring you out and sit you down on a throne next to His sovereign throne.

[5] Out from the throne come flashes of lightening and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

“Out from the throne” – lit. “And from the throne”; “come flashes of lightening and sounds and peals of thunder” – “come” [ek-poreuomai – to break forth; to go forth; go out; present indicative passive voice; 3rd person singular]; “lightening” [astrapai]; “sounds” [pho-nay]; “thunders” [bron-tay]; lightening flashes, sounds and thunder picture the judgment of God – the lightening, sounds, and thunder are a precursor to the wrath of God being poured out in the seal, trumpets, and bowls judgments in chapters 6-18.

“And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne” – “burning” [kaio – to light; to set fire; present participle passive voice; nom. fem. plural]; “which are the seven Spirits of God” – “are” [eisin – present indicative active; 3rd person plural]; “seven” [number of completion or fullness]; “Spirits of God” – the fullness of the Holy Spirit’s presence is before the throne of God and the symbolic vision of seven torches pictures the Holy Spirit as One with the Father in bringing judgment upon the world. Rev. 1:4.

[6] and before the throne there was something like 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 before the throne there was something like a sea of glass” – lit. “and before the throne like a glass sea” – “glass” [malin-ay – used twice in Rev. here and 15:2]; “like crystal” [krustallo]; notice it doesn’t say a river of glass or a lake of glass but a sea of glass. This glass pavement that resembles a crystal clear sea is massive/huge/large area in God’s throne room. The sea of glass like crystal is a contrast from the rumbling waves of the world, the restlessness of society the upheaval of governments in the world is not reflected in God’s throne room. Everything is as peaceful like a sea of glass. Don’t confuse what happens on earth with what it must be like in heaven. There are no worries in glory, there is no alarm in heaven, there is no panic before the throne of God.

“and in the center and around the throne” – lit. “and in the middle of the throne and around the throne”; There may be a hierarchical order here, with the central figures [closer to the throne] presented last...[Osborne] – “four living creatures” [KJV – four beasts] lit. “four living beings” [New Living Translation – “four living beings”]; Question: Why would these four creatures be called “four living beings”? Isn’t every creature in heaven living? Here’s the answer – “full of eyes in front and behind” – lit. “being full of eyes in front and behind” – “eyes” are the most important sensory organ that has symbolic meaning – intelligence, conscience, awareness. Why do morticians close the eyes of the dead? So that the dead look asleep but not only that for the eyes of the dead to be open is settling to the living because “eyes are the window to the soul”. Therefore, “full of eyes” entails that fact that the four living beings see everything in relation to the glory of God. This is made clear by how they respond in worship and service in heaven. I believe these four living beings were moving around the throne so that John was able to see them as they revolved around the throne.

These four living beings are not the same ones that Ezekiel saw in his vision in Ezek. 1:5-10. Those were cherubim, each with four faces – the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of a bull, and the face of an eagle and they each had four wings. These four living beings are different than the seraphim in Isaiah’s vision that had six wings. So we see that there are various kinds and ranks of angels in heaven. There are arch-angels, cherubim of different kinds, seraphim and here four living beings each with different faces with six wings.

The 2nd mental picture from this heavenly vision that is meant to radically change how we view the world around us is: God is so holy in everything that He does that all of heaven cannot stop singing about it [vv. 7-11]

[7] 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 third creature had a face like that of a man” – lit. “the third being having the face like a man”; “and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle” – “flying” [petomai – to fly; present participle middle voice; dat. masc. singular]

The lion [royalty], the ox [strength], man [intelligence], eagle [speed]. All of these characteristics are reflective of God’s nature – lion [kingship], ox [strength], man [intelligence] and eagle [transcendent]

[8] 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 day and night they do not cease” – “cease” [avapausis – intermission; cessation]; “Holy, Holy, Holy” [hagios, hagios, hagios – worthy of veneration; His incomparable majesty]; Holiness never gets old in heaven. The doctrine of the thrice holiness God is not a seasonal song in glory. Something you sing on the first Sunday of the month. Every day it is good to sing that God is Holy, Holy, Holy.

Scrip. Ref: Isa. 6:3 – The one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”

“Holy, Holy, Holy” – the focus here is not just who God is but also how we ought to respond in light of who He is. The one attribute above all else that fascinates, exuberant, and mesmerizes the occupants of heaven is the holiness of God. The one attribute that turns most professing Christians away or off is the holiness of God. We want the love of God only. What makes the church so unlike heaven is a lack of joy in God’s holiness.

We like to pit grace and holiness against each other. It’s the grace of God that causes me to marvel at the holiness of God. And it is the holiness of God that causes me to be amazed at the grace of God. Grace keeps me safe in God’s holiness. [It’s like viewing the most beautiful and yet dangerous animals from the safety of an unbreakable window without the fear of being attacked. Like viewing the beauty of outer space from a space ship without the fear of being of the outside elements killing me.]

Grace keeps me safe in order that I am enjoy the holiness of God. Holiness keeps me thankful at the grace of God. Though grace enables me to not be threatened by the Holiness of God, yet it does cause me to reverence it. The truth of the matter is that when it comes to God we don’t fear His wrath or hell but His holiness which produces the wrath and hell.

You cannot walk away from the book of Revelation without the sense of the holiness of God. This is what makes everything that is about to happen with God's creation from chapter 5-22 make sense.

Holiness – thrice perfect in purity and morality; Almighty – omnipotent; Eternal – He can never die or cease to exist; in Him we live and move and have our being

“the Almighty” [ho pavto-krator – He who holds sway over all things; Rev. 1:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22]; [used 9 times in the book], “referring to His sovereign power and control over His created universe” [Osborne].
 “who was and who is and who is to come” – “who was” [eimi – imperfect indicative active 3rd person singular – the One who was being]; “who is” [ho on – present participle active nom. masc. singular – the One who is being]; “who is to come” [ho erchomai – to come; present participle middle voice; nom. masc. singular – the One who is coming]; “emphasis is on the God who sovereignly controls, past, present and future” [Osborne]

There is no genuine worship apart from a transcendent view of a sovereign, omnipotent and thrice holy God. If you tamper with this theology in your Bible you don't have true worship in the church. When the church recaptures the joy of God's sovereignty, omnipotence and holiness is when the church will live by faith, walk in obedience and turn from sin.

We ought to be a church that rejoices in the holiness of God as much as we rejoice in the grace of God, the love of God and the mercy of God. We ought to rejoice in God's purity, rejoice that we serve a God in whom there is no darkness at all, there is no deceit in this God, no misleading us in this God, no lie in this God, no unfaithfulness to His promise in this God, no trickery in this God. We can trust Him because He is holy. We should worship Him because He is holy –

there are many questionable things you can do in life that would cause you to second guess yourself but it is never questionable to worship a Holy God and serve Him. God is good to us, while at the same time being Holy. The most morally pure, ethically right, good and just thing you and I can do that brings glory to God and produces a clear conscience, enhances mental health and sustains joy in the soul is to treasure the holiness of God in our lives. If angels and elders can sing about the holiness of God without becoming bored, imagine how much treasuring this attribute will subdue sin and produce more joy in us. A church whose chief pursuit is not the holiness of God is a carnal church.

[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,

“And when the living creatures give glory” – “give” [didomi – future indicative active 3rd person plural]; “glory” [doxan – praise, glory, recognition]; “honor” [timnen]; “thanksgiving” [eucharistia – thanks; giving of thanks; Rev. 7:12]; “to Him who sits on the throne” – “to Him who sits” [to kathemeno – to be seated; present participle; middle voice; dat. masc. singular – to the One who Himself is sitting]; “to Him who lives forever and ever” – “to Him who lives” [to zao – to be alive; present participle active; dat. masc. singular]; “forever and ever” – lit. “unto the eternity of eternities”; “unto the forever of the forevers”.

[10] 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,

“the twenty-four elders will fall down” – “fall down” [pipto – to fall; to prostrate; future indicative middle voice; 3rd

person plural]; “before Him who sits” [tou kathenenou – present participle active; gen. masc. singular]; “on the throne”; “and will worship” [pros-kuneo – to prostrate; to fall down; to worship; future indicative active; 3rd person plural]; “Him who lives forever and ever” – lit. to the One who lives unto the forever of the forevers; “and will cast their crowns before the throne” – “cast” [ballo – to throw; present indicative active; 3rd person plural]; they cast their crowns because they realize that their victory, their ability to overcome trials and to persevere to the end is because of God’s keeping power”; Crowns are not as important as bowing before the throne. Your victory is never as important as you reverencing God; Don’t get so high and mighty as if you can’t bow anymore at the glory of God. “saying” [lego – present participle active nom. masc. plural]

[11] “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

“Worthy are You” – “Worthy” [bowing reminds me of the only One who is worthy to be praised] “are you” [eimi – to be; present indicative active; 2nd person singular]; “our Lord and our God” – lit. “the Lord and our God”; “to receive” [lambano – present infinitive active]; “glory and honor and power” – lit. “the glory and the honor and the power”; “for You created all things” – “created” [ktizo – aorist indicative active 2nd person singular]; “all things” [ta panta – the all things; neuter accus. plural]; “and because of Your will” [to thelema – will; what one wishes or has determined shall be done]; “they existed” [esan from eimi – imperfect indicative active 3rd person plural; they were being]; “and were created” [ktizo – aorist indicative active 3rd person plural]

Our existence is depended upon His power. Therefore in light of who He is, we thank Him for creating us. Because we realize He didn't have to do it. God gave us life not out of personal necessity but as a gift. And it is only right that we thank Him for bringing us into existence. You would have no life if it wasn't for God. Every breath you take is a gift, your heartbeat is a gift, your brain activity is a gift and how often do we thank Him for these things. You didn't come in here this morning with nothing. God has given you physical life today. Therefore, we ought to give Him glory.

Quote: One commentator – “In heaven, worship and reverence are apparently not defined as silence”.

Conclusion: