

PM Revelation 4-5 The Heavenly Perspective

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[0 : 00] This I looked, and behold a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.

At once I was in the Spirit, and behold a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings, and peals of thunder. And before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.

And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind.

[1 : 19] The first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within. And day and night they never cease to say, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him, who is seated on the throne, and worship him, who lives forever and ever.

They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

Amen. And may God bless to us that reading from his word. Shall we sing again this time in Psalm 33? Psalm 33, The right hand of him who was seated on the throne, a scroll, written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

[2 : 52] And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll, and break its seals.

And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look into it. And I began to weep loudly, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll, or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, Weep no more. Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.

And between the throne and the four living creatures, and among the elders, I saw a lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

[4 : 21] And they sang a new song, saying, Worthy are you to take the scroll, and to open its seals, for you were slain.

And by your blood you ransomed people for God, from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God.

And they shall reign on the earth. Then I looked, and I heard around the throne, and the living creatures, and the elders, the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and

wealth, and wisdom and might, and honour and glory and blessing.

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth, and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, To him who sits on the throne and to the lamb, be blessing and honour and glory and might, forever and ever.

And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped.

[5 : 54] Amen. And may God bless to us that further reading from his word, and to his name be the praise.

Shall we come before the Lord again? May I invite you to turn back to the passages we read, Revelation 4 and 5.

I'd like to look at this passage with you, under the title, The Heavenly Perspective. There's a great deal of uncertainty and turmoil at the moment.

There's war in Ukraine and in the Middle East. There's political and financial instability. There's a cost of living crisis.

There are challenges to Christian witness. To say nothing of the pressures which we may be facing individually. All these things contribute to a sense of unease.

[7 : 04] The Christians for whom Revelation was first written, were well aware that life could be hard.

They lived in what is now Western Turkey, around the end of the first century. And they faced many pressures.

That's made clear in chapters 2 and 3, where there are letters, specific letters, to seven churches in that area.

If we take the Christians in the city of Smyrna as an example, we learn that many of them were struggling with poverty.

They were being slandered by Jewish opponents of the gospel. And they were facing persecution.

[8 : 02] Some of them were going to be imprisoned. And some were going to be put to death. It was to reassure Christians like that, that it was worth hanging on to the gospel, that the book of Revelation was written.

And like them, we too need to know, in an uncertain and unstable world, that we should not give up on the gospel either.

Here in chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation, the Apostle John's focus moves from the immediate circumstances of the churches to which he is writing, to what is going on in heaven.

In his vision, he gets the heavenly perspective, which needs to be set against what is going on in the world.

We often call this the real world. But there are ultimate realities, which transcend this world of time and sense.

[9 : 26] Think of a beautiful piece of embroidery. The scene it depicts stands out in glowing colours.

There is not a thread out of place. But turn the embroidery over, and the underside looks a mess. On one side there is beauty and order.

On the other, an apparently meaningless tangle of threads. What is going on in the world as we see it, is so often like the underside of a piece of embroidery.

But here in chapters 4 and 5, we give the perspective of heaven. And what do we see? We see beauty and order, meaning and purpose.

John struggles to describe what he sees in his vision. Words fail him. We shouldn't treat his descriptions as a sort of photographic representation.

[10 : 42] It's not so much a photograph as an impressionist painting. Many of the details may be unclear. But if we stand back, and try to take in the broad brush strokes, we begin to get the picture.

In chapter 1 of verse 4, John sees a door standing open in heaven. And what does he see? I'd like to highlight three things in particular.

First of all, he tells us in verse 2, At once I was in the Spirit, John sees a throne.

A throne that's occupied. A throne is where a king or queen sits on formal occasions.

It's a symbol of the sovereignty and power they exercise. The throne which John sees makes the point that there's a king in heaven.

[12 : 15] One who's in charge. One who's in control. The king's identity is made clear later in the chapter. Verse 8, He is the Lord God Almighty.

And verse 11, He is our Lord and God. It's God who is on the throne. The triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is king.

And he's a glorious king. The mention of precious stones, jasper, carnelian, emerald, hints at his splendor. Hints at his splendor and majesty.

The rainbow that's around the throne enhances this impression of splendor. But it may also point to something else.

Bible words have Bible meanings. And it's often useful to see how the same word is used in other passages of scripture.

[13:23] The phenomenon of the rainbow is first mentioned as you probably know way back in Genesis chapter 9. After the flood which only Noah and the other occupants of the ark survived.

God promised that he would never again send a flood to destroy all living things. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds he said I will remember my covenant and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

The flood had been a judgment on a sinful humanity. But from now on the rainbow would be a token of God's gracious promise never again to destroy all humanity in that way.

In that light the rainbow around the throne may be intended intended to remind us that the God who sits on the throne exercises his authority in accordance with his covenant promises.

He is an awesome God but he is merciful. He keeps his promises. And that too is an essential aspect of his glory.

[15:06] Great God of wonders all thy ways are godlike matchless and divine but the fair glories of thy grace more godlike and unrivaled shine.

Who is a pardoning God like thee? Or who has grace so rich and free? In verses 5 and 6 of chapter 4 we read From the throne came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire which are the seven spirits of God.

Flashes of lightning rumbles and peals of thunder fire what does that remind us of?

It is an echo of Exodus chapter 19 where God comes down on Mount Sinai to give the Israelites his law.

On that occasion there was thunder and lightning the Lord descended in fire and the mountain was wrapped in smoke.

[16:30] The Israelites found the whole experience deeply unsettling. They were meant to and we are meant to be awed by John's description of the throne in heaven.

He is reminding us here that the God of the New Testament is the same God as in the Old Testament. In the New Testament there is a clearer focus on his grace and mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ but he is still the same awesome God.

During his earthly ministry Jesus spoke of the one who is able to throw both soul and body into hell. No one had more to say about hell than Jesus himself.

The apostle Paul pleads with his readers to be reconciled to God because he knows the fear of the Lord. And the writer to the Hebrews describes God as a consuming fire.

He warns that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Judgment awaits all those who persist in defying the glorious king who sits on the throne.

[18:03] In verse 6 John sees a sea of glass like crystal before the throne. That is an amazing image.

It may be John's attempt to describe the vast expanse of what he sees. Its vivid brilliance. Its lucid purity.

But it may also be intended to convey heaven's transparent tranquility. The sea as we know it is often turbulent and restless.

But nothing disturbs the peace of heaven. The king on the throne is in complete control. Nothing and no one unsettles his rule and reign.

John then sees a glorious throne in heaven with a glorious occupant. The Christians who received this letter of revelation needed to hear that message.

[19:17] As they faced trials and persecution they might have been tempted to think that life was spiraling out of control. They needed to be reminded that God was on the throne.

That his authority was not in question. A cosmic battle might be raging between Satan and his minions and the church but God was on the throne and his authority was unchallenged and unchallengeable.

That's a message you and I need to hear too. God is on the throne. God should give us confidence in the midst of the turmoil and uncertainties of our world.

That should give us confidence in the midst of the pressures which may be confronting us personally. Do you know the old children's chorus?

God is still on the throne and he will remember his own though trials may press us and burdens distress us he never will leave us alone.

[20 : 37] God is still on the throne and he will remember his own. His promise is true.

He will not forget you. God is still on the throne. John sees a throne God is king.

The second thing that John sees which I would like to highlight is first mentioned in the first verse of chapter five. Then John writes I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back sealed with seven seals.

John sees a scroll. This scroll apparently contains God's purposes for the future.

The point of the scroll is that God has a plan for the world that he has made. But the scroll is sealed.

[21 : 57] It's securely sealed. It's sealed with seven seals. And that's a potential problem. John hears an angel proclaiming in a loud voice who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals.

It needs someone worthy to open the scroll. It needs someone with special qualifications to set God's plan in train to implement his purposes of grace and judgment.

As John looks around he cannot see anyone who meets the bill. He comes to the conclusion that there is no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth who is able to open the scroll or look into it. And so he begins to weep but he's told to stop weeping. He's given the assurance that the lion of the tribe of Judah the root of David has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.

God has a plan and there is someone who is uniquely qualified to implement it. He's called the lion of the tribe of Judah.

[23 : 35] Way back in the book of Genesis when the patriarch Jacob was dying he blessed each of his twelve sons.

He declared that Judah would be their leader. Judah your father's sons he said shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub.

He stooped down. He crouched as a lion and as a lioness. Who dares rouse him? There's an echo of Jacob's words here in the title the lion of the tribe of Judah.

It seems the one who can open the scroll comes from the tribe of Judah and possesses formidable power. He's also described as the root of David.

That is shorthand for his being a descendant of great King David. As we noted this morning God promised King David that he would establish a dynasty through David which would last forever.

[24 : 48] It seems the one who is accounted worthy to open the scroll is a king in David's line. But how is he worthy to open the scroll?

How is he qualified to set God's purposes in motion? Because in the words of verse 5 he has conquered.

The lion of the tribe of Judah the root of David has conquered. He has secured a resounding victory. But what does that mean?

With that John sees thirdly a lamb. He writes in verse 6 between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain with seven horns and with seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

There is a throne God is king there is a scroll God has a plan and now we have a lamb God's plan is guaranteed.

[26 : 20] It's the Lord Jesus Christ John sees as a lamb looking as though it had been slain. He has just been called the lion of the tribe of Judah and a mighty lion is very different from a weak defenseless lamb.

But John's vision focuses on the fact that Jesus allowed himself to be put to death like a sacrificial lamb.

Admittedly the lamb John sees has seven horns which symbolize it seems great power and it also has seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent into all the earth.

The seven eyes presumably denote Jesus omnipresence. He is present everywhere by his Holy Spirit. But the fact is that the lamb looks as though it had been slain.

The imagery of a slain lamb resonates with the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Think of the Passover lamb of Exodus chapter 12.

[27 : 46] On the night the Israelites escaped from slavery in Egypt. There was a death in each house in the land.

In the homes of the Egyptians the firstborn son died. the firstborn sons of the Israelites were spared but in their houses too there was a death.

Each household, each Israelite household had to kill a lamb and daub its blood on the lintel and doorposts of their house.

When God passed through the land of Egypt in judgment it wasn't just the Egyptians who deserved judgment. The Israelites deserved it too but in his mercy God ordained that a slain lamb could be a substitute for the firstborn son.

He promised that when he saw the blood the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel he would pass over. Hundreds of years later when Jesus began his public ministry John the Baptist pointed him out and said look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[29 : 27] John recognized who Jesus was. He recognized he was the Messiah and he used the language of sacrifice to describe why he had come into the world.

Jesus purpose in coming was to give his life for a sinful humanity and so pay the penalty which our sins deserved. Only by his death would he reconcile people to God.

Only by his death would he defeat Satan and secure eternal life for all who would put their trust in him. He was a great teacher but he came to do more than teach.

He performed amazing miracles but he came to do more than heal physical ailments. He was a great example but he came to show us more than how we should live.

His main purpose in coming was to be our Saviour and it was through his death and through his death alone he was able to defeat sin and death and Satan.

[30 : 52] That was how he conquered that was how he was worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.

God the father had determined to save a people for himself. He commissioned his son to lay down his life for sinners and in obedience to his father Jesus willingly died the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

When just before he died on the cross Jesus said it is finished. Some onlookers might have interpreted that as a cry of despair but far from being a cry of despair it was a cry of victory. It is finished. The price was paid. The Messiah had finished the work which his father had given him to do.

As the saviour he had fully and finally defeated sin and death and Satan he had conquered.

[32 : 17] the new song which is set out in verses 9 and 10 of chapter 5 makes that clear. The song is sung by the four living creatures John has described in chapter 4.

They are probably angelic beings and by the 24 elders who represent the people of God under both the old covenant and the new look at what they sing worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed!

people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth the song explicitly states that Jesus is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals precisely because he was slain and by his blood ransomed people for God now that Jesus has died God's master plan for his world his master plan for a redeemed humanity is unstoppable John sees a throne a scroll and a lamb God reigns there is a plan and there is one who has authority to implement it

God is in control his purposes are being worked out history is moving to its appointed end through his death Jesus has redeemed his people from their sins and inaugurated God's everlasting kingdom God's plan is now unchallengeable and unstoppable that's the perspective which the Lord Jesus wanted the apostle John's first century Christian readers to have as they wrestled with life in a fallen world and began to experience opposition and persecution he wants us to have the same perspective if we look around there is so much that would cause us discouragement and distress we need to be reminded that

God is on the throne that his purposes are sure and that our saviour has secured the decisive victory I wonder if you have heard the story of how the news of the battle of Waterloo in 1815 was brought to England word was carried first by ship to the south coast of England and from there it

was meant to be relayed by signal flag to London when the report was received in Winchester the flags on top of the cathedral began to spell it out Wellington defeated but before the message could be completed a heavy fog moved in and the rest of the message was obscured people in the surrounding countryside were really sad because they concluded that

[36 : 30] Napoleon had won what other message could they take from it Wellington defeated it was only when the mists began to clear that it became evident that the signals really spelled out Wellington defeated the enemy these last two words made all the difference and we need to take on board the full picture which the Bible presents to us the heavenly perspective may be very different from how things look from a purely worldly point of view we need this heavenly perspective and in the light of it we need to trust the Lord who reigns and has a plan we need to trust the saviour who has already won the victory and we need to join the company of heaven as they respond in worship

John tells us in chapter 4 that the 24 elders fall down before God's throne and worship him they cast their thrones before the throne and say worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created and in chapter 5 John hears every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them saying to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever to which the four living creatures add their amen and the twenty four elders fall down and worship there's a real sense in which praise is the antidote to despondency and we need to join that chorus of praise now if we are to be among God's redeemed people in his eternal kingdom shall we pray so that