

A Throne In Heaven

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Date: 11 September 2022

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[0 : 0 0] Please turn with me this morning to Revelation chapter 4 and verse 2. Revelation 4 verse 2.

But once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne. A throne stood in heaven.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your Spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern through Jesus Christ.

Our Lord, amen. On Thursday evening, the skies wept. The rain fell like a flood of tears.

It was as if the heavens knew that our Queen had passed away and were mourning her death. Later that evening, myself and my wife took a walk around George Square in the center of Glasgow and stood in the pouring rain in front of the war memorial to pay our respects to our Queen.

[1 : 1 2] As we stood there, a young lady approached and lay a single red rose on the steps to the war memorial. It was a poignant moment for us.

Made it all the more emotional because the pubs surrounding George Square were overflowing with drunken young men and women at the time. Oblivious to the rain, they were staggering in their revelry from pub to pub to pub.

But over it all, the skies kept weeping until its tears became a shallow lake on George Square.

I wanted to grab these drunken young men and women. I wanted to shake them by the shoulders and bring them to their senses. Don't you realize what's happened?

And then I realized something. Our beloved Queen may have died. We saw her in George Square many years ago where Catherine sang for her. But not only has her son succeeded her as King Charles III, but as Christians, we serve a better king than Charles III.

[2 : 2 5] We serve the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. The throne of Great Britain may have been empty for a time, but the throne of heaven has never been empty.

For upon it sits the mighty God of heaven and earth. And at the heart of his rule and government is a lamb, looking as though it had been slain, King Jesus himself.

We have a throne standing in heaven today. And before it we bow in praise and worship. For the king on that throne will never die, but will always reign.

John the Apostle, who was a very old man, was given the vision that we call today the book of Revelation. And he'd lived through tumultuous changes concerning who sat on the throne of the Roman Emperor.

There was Augustus and Tiberius. There was Caligula and there was Claudius. There was Nero, then a succession of minor emperors, stretching to Domitian, under whose rule John had been exiled to a small Greek island called Patmos.

[3 : 47] And it was there, while in the vision, we read in Revelation chapter 4 verse 2, John saw a throne standing in heaven and the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings seated on that throne.

And today for a short while, given the historical significance of this Sunday, the death of our Queen, the accession of King Charles III to our throne, I want us to join with the Apostle John as we focus our eyes upon this heavenly throne.

Briefly this morning, there are three aspects of this throne I want us to focus our attention upon. Its reality, its permanence, and its occupancy.

Its reality, its permanence, and its occupancy. Reality, first of all, the reality of this throne. Our verse begins, At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven.

The throne John saw. The word behold, then in verse 2, in another sense, which is where the phrase in the Spirit comes in.

[5 : 09] It does mean fix your attention upon, because this is of primary significance, but it also means things are not what they appear to be.

Things are not what they appear to be. Things might appear to be a certain way, but behold, the reality is very different. Things are not what they appear to be.

In the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy and her companions discover that the wizard is in fact an eccentric old man who's been playing a trick on Oz for years. Things were not what they appear to be in Oz, and that for the worse.

In the exact opposite sense, things are not what they appear to be when it comes to God, and that for the infinitely better.

Think back again to how John the Apostle, the writer of Revelation and the Gospel, refers to how John the Baptist points to Jesus and cries out, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[6 : 13] When they looked at Jesus, all they could see was a common man, just like any other. There was nothing particularly noticeable or unique about Jesus' appearance.

He was the same color as every other Middle Eastern man. He wore the same clothes. He spoke with the same dialect. But things are not what they appear to be.

He may look just like everyone else, but in reality, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And in the same way, when it comes to authority, power, and kingship, things are not what they appear to be.

John the Apostle is in exile on this remote island. His brother James is long dead, having been put to death by Herod with the sword.

Peter's dead, having been crucified upside down in Rome. Paul is dead. He is the only surviving apostle. by this stage in the late first century A.D.

[7 : 23] Jerusalem had been destroyed, and power rested solely in the hands of the Roman Emperor Domitian by whose dictates men lived and died. For all the world it looked that universal power rested in the changeable, cruel, and often vicious hands of Emperor Domitian.

But things are not what they appear to be. There is a higher throne than that of Rome. It's a universal throne.

It stands in heaven. The natural man can't see it. That's why we need to be in the spirit to see it. Because it's only with spiritual eyes that we can see that the throne in heaven upon which God sits is so much greater and so much more powerful than any here on earth.

At this time our physical eyes can't see this higher throne but in the spirit by the grace of God we gaze upon it with wonder and amazement with reverence and with awe.

Before this heavenly throne all earthly powers Domitian included must bow. Oh it doesn't appear that way to us right now.

[8 : 45] But behold things are not what they appear to be and today in the spirit we see a throne standing in heaven upon which God sits.

Now we have a crisis in Ukraine. We have economic hardship. We have global warming. We have pandemics and now to top it all we have the death of our queen.

perhaps it seems to us that no one is in ultimate control. For now the throne of Great Britain is empty but we may feel that this empty throne is but a metaphor of the emptier throne of universal authority.

Is no one in control of the universe? Is there a higher meta-narrative? And John says to us behold he says things are not what they appear to be.

There's a throne standing in heaven. This world appears to be lawless but it's not. For God sits on his heavenly throne and he's in sovereign control of all things.

[9 : 57] If you're a Christian today things are not what they appear to be. Take comfort. Drag your attention away from this world's empty thrones and focus them upon the throne upon which God, Father, Son and Spirit sits in heaven.

If you're not yet a Christian things are not what they appear to be. But you have the invitation of God himself to see him seated in majesty.

the queen's passing gives the opportunity to reflect on God's higher throne without which there is no ultimate security that this world is going anywhere good.

By comparison the reality of God's heavenly throne offers you life and hope in believing through Jesus Christ our Lord. reality.

Second thing about this throne permanence permanence we witness something historic in our day the longest serving monarch in British history was Queen Elizabeth II.

[11 : 19] She was our queen for over 70 years. Most of us have lived our entire lives under her sovereign reign and all we've had from our queen is good.

Her Christmas messages inspired us and as for us as Christians her faith often kept us going in difficult times. She travelled widely and it was largely through her influence that the commonwealth is what it is today.

What was once the British Empire is now a fellowship of nations. where we think of one another as a global family working for the good of our world.

You don't have to be a monarchist to recognise all the good our queen has done for us over these last 70 years. Two days before she died she invited Liz Truss to be the Prime Minister of Great Britain.

Think of all the world events which have taken place in the last 70 years. She reigned through them all. Her first Prime Minister was Winston Churchill.

[12 : 36] For many of us she was a constant presence and I for one I'm not alone haven't come to terms with her not being around anymore. She seemed so permanent as our new Prime Minister said the queen was the rock upon which modern Britain was built and that rock is now gone.

We knew it would eventually come. Perhaps the death of her husband Philip drove it home to us that she herself wouldn't last forever. She lived for 96 years beyond the lifespan of most of us but even she the most powerful person in Great Britain had no mastery over death.

Like King Canute 1,200 years ago no matter how much she may have wished the tides of time to go back she couldn't do it.

So the days of the queen are now consigned to the history books and we have a new king who will eventually go the way of his mother and so on.

And for all the good the queen has done who knows whether her successors will build upon it or demolish it. Even her greatest achievements are fragile to the events of the future.

[14 : 00] There's just so much uncertainty isn't there and so much impermanence. By contrast consider what the apostle John teaches us. I was in the spirit and behold a throne stood in heaven.

This throne stood there in the days of John the apostle as it had done in the days of Abraham the patriarch as it does to this very day.

This throne stood in heaven on the day the stones which make up Stonehenge were lifted in the position.

This throne stood in heaven the day that Alexander the Great died of fever in Babylon. This throne stood in heaven on the day in which Jesus was crucified. This throne in heaven stood on the day the first man walked on the moon.

This throne stood in heaven on Thursday when our queen went to be with her king whom she served so faithfully for 96 years.

[15 : 11] This throne stands today and will stand in a thousand years when humankind has colonized Mars and today's science fiction has become science fact.

God is seated on a permanent throne. in Psalm 93 verse 1 we sang together the Lord is king. He was king when that psalm was written B.C.

He's king today. He will always be king. It's as our children were once taught to sing king of kings lord of lords forever and ever.

we may wear clothes of mourning today and rightly so for our beloved queen our sister in Christ has died. The day will soon come to put away these clothes of mourning and rejoice again.

However the day will never come when we must don mourning clothes on account of the death of God. 500 years ago the German reformer Martin Luther as was often his pattern was deeply depressed.

[16 : 29] Nothing could shake him from his melancholy not even reading his bible not even singing a hymn. For days his face was downcast his words were as thunder and he was a misery to be around.

We don't know him like that do we? His loving wife Katie became so desperate that one day she entered into Luther's study dressed in a long black dress and with a black mourning veil around her face.

And Luther looked up at her and said Katie who's died that you're going to that person's funeral? And his wife said to him Martin God has died.

Well at least that's the way you're acting Martin. Katie's wit and gentle rebuke brought Luther to his senses and lifted his depression because if God remains on the throne of the universe if our heavenly father is still the king of kings what need have we of utter despair?

The psalm reminds us At night weeping may endure at mourn doth joy arise the God who sits in heaven is permanent he is king of kings lord of lords and he ain't going anywhere here I'm very fond of quoting John Buchan the great Scottish author when he wrote even the best of men are men at best the queen was the best of men rather women and men but she remained a man or woman at best and mortality was her ultimate limitation the throne of God in heaven knows no such limitation of mortality it will never fall into ruin because it's God's throne he was our father's God he will be God to our children to him be glory forever reality permanence and then lastly occupancy occupancy

[18 : 46] I guess none of us will ever forget what Queen Elizabeth II looked like for some of us I'm sure our abiding image is that of a young lady at her coronation for others the queen in her later mature years but by virtue of the fact that I guess for the next few years coinage with her image will still be in circulation we will not soon forget her face the face of royalty is now King Charles III remains what to see what kind of king he will be King Charles I and King Charles II were not wonderful kings so let's hope he does better don't you write that we give him the chance to stamp his personality on what it means to be king and pray for him but for all that the throne felt like it was empty after the queen's death it is now filled by a king the

British throne has a face that of King Charles III what John saw concerning the occupancy of the throne in heaven can only be described using pictures he looked at who sat upon that throne in heaven and all he could say was and he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian they're both precious stones and all God could say about all John could say about God was that he had the appearance of these precious stones there's no description of arms or body or face the appearance of God because as a spirit he in terms of pictures colors textures the surroundings to the throne are by any stretch awesome there are all the colors of the rainbow there are flashes of lightning there are peals of thunder there are human beings made glorious and there's a great sea of glass like crystal but we cannot see the face of the

God who sits on the throne unlike the throne of great Britain we cannot attach a face to a king who is spirit and has no body and yet we learn that before that throne stands a lamb looking as though it had been slain later in the book of revelation in chapter 7 that lamb is described as being in the midst of the throne there he is God has a face and that face is that of a lamb looking as though it had been slain it's the face of Jesus himself the God who is spirit has a face it's that of Jesus Christ the king of kings and the lord of lords immortal invisible god only wise are crucified and risen savior who is he in yonder stall at whose feet the angels fall tis the lord oh wondrous story tis the lord the king of glory

Jesus Christ the lord of glory the lamb slain on the cross by the Romans and the religious authorities he is the face of God and it's a face filled not only with love for us not merely spoken love rather but love demonstrated in that while we were yet sinners he died for us he has risen from the dead he has ascended into the heavens he has been glorified beyond the appearance of any angel but still Jesus carries in his appearance the scars of his sacrifice he died on the cross to take away my sins your sins the sins of kings and queens all of whom as we've read in

Revelation chapter 4 must cast their crowns before him and proclaim him Lord our queen she spent her whole life casting her crown before King Jesus she stood in need of as much mercy as even the poorest in her kingdom she knew the face of God in Jesus Christ he was the queen's king on Thursday evening the skies of Glasgow wept on Friday morning the sun came out we mourn our queen we grieve for our queen but we don't grieve as those who have no hope for we know the queen has gone to meet her king and for those of us who have placed our faith and hope in Jesus Christ as lord and king for those of us who have placed our trust in what king Jesus has done on the cross by dying to take away the sins of the world the son of righteousness shines because heaven is real permanent and occupied if you're not yet a

[24 : 35] Christian in these days of uncertainty and mourning can I invite you to find certainty and hope here not so much in the throne of an earthly king king charles the third but in the everlasting throne of Jesus Christ our Lord and our saviour to whom with the father and the holy spirit be glory both now and always