

The throne in heaven

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[0 : 0 0] After 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 round the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, closed 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 round the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind.

[1 : 2 0] 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. Thanks so much for reading, Este.

[2 : 3 6] Let's keep Revelation 4 open if you've got a copy of it, otherwise not to worry. Hopefully you've got a sermon outline handy. Let's have a look at this amazing chapter together. Now, often, when Lizzie and I are walking somewhere, I'll point to something in the distance.

And she'll look, kind of, sort of squint a bit, and tilt her head a bit, and then say, I can't see it. I haven't got my glasses on.

Now, maybe she should have gone to a particular optical establishment. Maybe she should just actually wear her glasses. But the truth is, all of us need help with our vision.

And we look at our world, we see brokenness and pain and persecution, and it can seem quite chaotic and messy. We kind of squint and tilt our heads a bit, and, well, it's hard to see how God is at work.

Perhaps we kind of see, but it's blurry. So we live half-hearted Christian lives. Perhaps we don't see at all. And so that's why we've never committed to follow Jesus.

[3 : 47] We operate in this tangible, seeing is believing world, and so many mock the idea of God, it can seem foolish to believe. But what we need most is to see things as they really are.

And through the book of Revelation, Jesus wants to correct our vision. But more than new glasses, he comes with a snazzy x-ray pair of night vision goggles, so we can see behind the scenes what is really going on, and who is really in charge of our world.

Before we head for chapter 4, turn with me to chapter 1, verse 9. The Apostle John has been exiled to an island called Patmos because of his preaching, and verse 10, he says, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamum, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

John then has this amazing vision of the ruling, reigning Lord Jesus, and he falls at his feet as though dead, awestruck. And then Jesus says, verse 17, Fear not.

I am the first and the last and the living one. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this.

[5 : 26] So from then on, John records the stunning, and at times baffling, vision he sees of world history playing out. And amongst the details and the intricacy, the big message of the whole book of Revelation becomes clear.

God wins. And that is the truth Jesus seems to think we most need if we're to live for him whatever comes our way. So as we look together over the next few weeks at chapters 4 to 11, they paint the picture in broad brushstrokes.

God is on his throne, Christ has conquered, and history still to come is in God's hands. Well, we looked at chapters 2 and 3 where Jesus addresses the seven churches in turn last summer, and those sermons are online if you want to revisit them.

But now as we look at chapter 4, Jesus shows John and the seven churches one foundational truth that makes all that follows in 5 to 11 possible.

Chapter 4 makes wonderfully, reassuringly clear the glorious God is on his throne. The glorious God is on his throne.

[6 : 47] If we're worried this world is a ship without a captain or if the pilot has fallen asleep at the helm, the first verses of chapter 4 come to us with deep reassurance.

John is invited by the majestic, glorified Lord Jesus to take a step into heaven through the open door before him. And notice the first thing he sees in verse 2.

At once I was in the spirit and behold, a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne.

The world is not a ship without a captain. The pilot has not disappeared mid-flight. Behind the curtain of our experience, right at the centre of the universe, in the heavenly control room, a glimpse of that reality shows a throne and it is not empty.

There's one seated on the throne. Everything is not left to chance. The world is not spinning at the perfect speed just by accident. At the heart of our universe is the glorious God on his throne.

[7 : 59] And chapter 4 is all about this occupied throne. The throne is referred to 12 times. Everything else in the chapter is given in reference to the throne.

Verse 2, behold a throne with one seated on it, on the throne. Verse 4, round the throne. Verse 5, from the throne. Verse 6, before the throne and around the throne. It's as if everything is saying to John, look at the throne, see the one there, he is glorious.

And so from verses 3 to 11, John shows us an out of this world spectacle and tells of two songs that play out.

I wonder if you can picture it as John describes. He looks at the throne and verse 3, he who was sat there had the appearance of Jasper and Carnelian and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

It's a bit like when you look at the sun and can only describe something of its brightness. When John looks at the throne it's like he's looking at the most precious stones in the world glinting, sparkling everywhere.

[9 : 15] Think crown jewels times a billion. The vibrant colours shine. This is beauty on the throne to highlight the splendour of the one seated there.

And the emerald rainbow that circles the throne is around the throne adds another layer of colour and majesty but maybe it also reminds us of God's dealings with Noah in Genesis.

You see the rainbow's shine it reveals the one on the throne to be the God who is always faithful. Next look at verse 4.

Round the throne were 24 thrones and seated on the thrones were 24 elders clothed in white robes with golden crowns on their heads. Now question marks remain about who exactly these characters are but it seems likely they're 12 elders representing the Old Testament sons of Abraham and 12 elders representing the New Testament apostles and together they combine to represent God's people all through history around the throne and they are radiant in their white garments and with their crowns on their heads seated on their mini thrones they sit perfected and pure underneath but sharing in the rule of the one on the throne.

and then comes verse 5 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.

[11 : 03] Now a proper storm is incredible and terrifying in equal measure with deafening thunder and bright fork lightning and here is one pouring forth from the throne of God revealing his power and his might but maybe also reminding us of the Lord meeting his people on Mount Sinai in the book of Exodus where he displayed similar power and his people trembled before him and then there are the seven torches blazing with fire around the throne we're told they represent the seven spirits of God and through the book of Revelation seven seems to be the number of perfection so here at the throne of God is his perfect presence now I think what John sees next is my favourite bit verse 6 and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass like crystal now all through the Bible raging seas are considered to signify chaos and death in the book of Jonah a storm erupts and the sailors think they're going to drown and then in Mark chapter 4 as Jesus sleeps peacefully in the boat a furious storm rises and waves are crashing in and the fishermen think they're going to drown but when

Jonah is thrown overboard God stops the seas raging and when the disciples wake Jesus in Mark 4 he simply speaks quiet be still and the storm stops and there is great calm if raging seas mean chaos and danger a sea that looks like this around the throne is a stunning contrast showing the rule of the God on the throne is not chaotic or panicked his is an unhurried rule and the last new thing John sees comes in the second half of verse 6 and if it wasn't all quite hard to fathom and imagine already now try this one verse 6 and around the throne on each side of the throne are four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind 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 four living creatures with eyes everywhere and different appearances it's odd isn't it and so the questions come what are they who are they well they're very similar to angelic figures that appear in Isaiah chapter 6 and Ezekiel chapter 1 and it seems these four heavenly creatures encompass the four corners of the earth and represent the noblest the strongest the wisest and swiftest of all creation such that here with their everywhere eyes they perfectly perceive the glory of God and they're around the throne to show us this is where all creation finds its rightful place now the things John depicts for us are attempts to describe the indescribable scene of the throne room he's stretching our imaginations to help us grasp the magnitude of what he saw but where what he saw is hard to grasp what's clear is what he heard and at the climax of chapter four two songs play out over the colours and the thunder and the lightning the creatures they cry holy holy holy and the elders they respond worthy are you our lord and god verse eight day and night the creatures they never cease to say holy holy holy is the lord god almighty who was and is and is to come that holy holy holy phrase appears as well in Isaiah six as the angelic figures there before god's throne declare the same phrase and in the bible it's the only descriptive term used for god in that repeated way it's repeated three times to add

a sense of extreme emphasis and that's true god is love he is light he's full of grace and mercy and justice but we never read that god is love love love or light light light rather he is those things because above all he is holy holy holy and part of the point of that word is that it's hard to describe and there's nothing that's easily comparable to it because well there's nothing that easily compares to god he is other he is different from us he's in a whole separate category god alone is god and these creatures cry that out non-stop holy holy holy lord lord god almighty is the other phrase they say and that is used in the old testament to highlight god as the one in power over everything he is the lord of kings and he's lord of armies he's the almighty one to whom no one compares now as the creatures cry out ceaselessly the 24 elders follow suit verse 10 they take off their crowns and cast them down before the lord in worship because they know all that they have comes from god and so they sing verse 11 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 the one on the throne made and owns and sustains all things credit where credit is due credit where credit is due we'd all nod along to the sentiment of that phrase wouldn't we so we've got a little painting that Lizzie's friend made she deserves the credit for it or take the running joke in our house about the illustrations that have appeared on my sermon outlines through lockdown now naturally kind people thank Lizzie for using her graphic design talents to bring some colour and life to my dull outlines but Lizzie's very quick to point out guys credit where credit is due they're not my illustrations Jake does them himself now I do wonder if she just simply says that so she can distance herself from them but the point remains to the extent that I created them the credit should come to me and these elders they've grasped that to the nth degree with god they know he is the great uncreated one everything else is made by him he is independent everything else depends on him credit where credit is due the glorious god on his throne is indeed worthy worthy of glory and honour and power worthy of everything we have worthy of our whole lives

there's none like him holy holy holy lord god almighty worthy are you our lord and god so put on the x-ray night vision goggles Jesus gives the book of revelation the unseen reality of our world is that at the centre of the universe the glorious God is seated on his throne now the truths revealed in John's vision have implications for every area of all of life but it's worth asking as we try to apply chapter four why did Jesus especially want John to see these things what about the situation of the seven churches John is originally writing for meant they needed the book of revelation well these first century churches were under Roman rule and they were facing severe persecution for following Jesus and more and more the culture was moving towards emperor worship and Christians were being pressured to ditch God and bow to Roman authority so what they needed most was to know that their God wins now often in New Testament letters the writer starts with rich truths at the beginning and then goes on to explain the implications afterwards but the book of revelation does something of the opposite in chapter two and three Jesus has addressed each of the seven churches encouraged the good rebuked the bad and called them to keep going hold on and then in the rest of the book from chapter four onwards he gives them the basis for confidence and the motivations they need to keep going so we're going to draw things together by having a look at how chapter four applies into the circumstances of chapter two and three the churches are all fairly mixed but broadly speaking they are either holding on to

Jesus well in the face of persecution compromised in some way or sleepy and it's into those three categories chapter four speaks so what about the persecuted church who are just struggling to hold on if you've got a Bible handy just turn with me to chapter two verse ten the church at Smyrna Jesus says to them do not fear what you are about to suffer behold the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested and for ten days you will have tribulation be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life now if the church at Smyrna are going to believe Jesus and keep going instead of giving up and bowing to Rome they need to really see

[23 : 56] God is on his throne and they need to really see he alone is worthy of their worship not Rome and we need the same if I'm being persecuted if I've lost my job for speaking of Jesus if my supposed friends at school are disowning me for sticking with Christ and his teaching I need to know that God on his throne is worthy of my worship I'm not a fool and however little we feel as individual Christians or as a church we can keep going because we've seen he is the almighty one Lord of armies and on his side we can be confident we win so we hold fast now if something of that resonates with you why not go back and read Jesus message to the church at Smyrna and Philadelphia and be encouraged to hold on to him but what about the compromised churches

Pergamum and Thyatira well in chapter 2 verse 14 and 15 Jesus says this to Pergamum I have a few things against you you have some there who hold the teachings of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality under pressure these guys are tolerating false teaching and they're dabbling with sin going astray compromised they're not willing to stand up for Jesus and his ways and if we're like them compromising on God's word calling his authority into question maybe ignoring what Jesus says about heaven and hell or not listening when Jesus talks about the seriousness of sexual sin Jesus warns them and us to stop to stop and see the holy worthy

God on the throne and ask ourselves who's on the throne of my life as I flirt with sin and allow false teaching if we'd put ourselves in this category compromised and drifting might be worth us reading again Jesus letters to Pergamum and Thyatira or lastly the sleepy and lukewarm churches Ephesus Sardis Laodicea to Laodicea in chapter 3 verse 15 Jesus says I know your works you're neither cold nor hot would that you were either cold or hot so because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold I will spit you out of my mouth Timothy or the church in Laodicea these Christians they're sleepwalking maybe once they were excited about

Jesus but they've cooled off they've forgotten the love they used to have and they're half hearted a bit for the Lord but only a bit and they need to wake up before they sleep walk away completely They need a fresh glimpse of their God on his throne, the one who is worthy of all of their devotion, not half their heart.

Now, I know sleepy and half-hearted is often a good description of my attitude towards God. And that is so sad. How can I just potter along half-hearted and sleepy as a Christian when my God is the glorious God on the throne, the holy, holy, holy one, worthy of all of my devotion and worship, not just some of it?

[28 : 05] A glimpse of him in chapter four over the last few weeks has been so good for me, warming my heart again to our great God on his throne, helping me to see afresh his goodness and rule.

Credit where credit is due. He really is worthy of all of our praise. And so visually and audibly, Revelation chapter four helps us to see the glory of God clearly.

It's a call to us all, whoever we are, to look with the perspective Jesus gives. Let's pray together.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. And we ask, please, that you'd help us to see clearly, with fresh eyes, the wondrous, glorious God that you are.

Help us to trust you and look to you all our days. And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[29 : 39] Amen. Amen. Amen.