

A Peek Into Heaven's Throne Room

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Date: 10 January 2016

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[0 : 0 0] Now, some of you came along a week or so ago when we read through the whole of Revelation from beginning to end. And if you weren't there and you've never done the task of reading Revelation, you will find that, and most of you know this, I suspect, is why you're here.

It is a book full of strange things, a strange book with strange things, strange numbers, weird animals, colors that have meaning, bizarre figures, unfamiliar language.

And there's this constant swapping between scenes in heaven and scenes on earth. So one minute you find yourself on earth looking at what is happening to God's people in place there.

But the next minute you are transported, as it were, into the heavenly places, into the throne of God himself. Suddenly you find yourself peering into heaven where the writer gives you a sort of behind-the-scenes look at what is going on.

And as we've seen, these first few chapters of the Bible are exactly like this, this constant swapping between heaven and earth. So in chapter 1, we start on earth and then we go into heaven.

[1 : 1 1] And in chapters 2 and 3, we swap back again. Then in chapter 4, we swap back into heaven again. And I want you to see it there in verse 1. John the prophet is speaking.

He says, And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, come up here.

In other words, take a trip with me, as it were. Take a trip up into heaven where you can see what is going on. Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.

And at once I was in the Spirit and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. Now the scene is clear, isn't it, as you look at it. This is a courtroom scene. Or perhaps it might even be a throne scene.

A throne room scene. My suspicion is that the people listening to this had a similar mind. Perhaps an imperial throne room or whatever.

[2 : 0 9] But for some time now, John has been listening. Back in chapter 1, verse 10, a booming loud voice like that of a trumpet had spoken. John turned around and he found that it was the voice of someone like a son of man.

It was the Lord Jesus. Well now, that very same booming voice, it's identified with the same words, speaks again. But this time, it is the Lord himself.

The Lord Jesus himself speaks again. Now he tells him that it's not so much, that he's speaking not so much to listen, but to watch.

You see, that's strikingly different in one sense. And through the retelling, as it were, we are being called to watch. You see, friends, I want you to understand this, you see.

It's not just that we are to listen, but we're actually to watch. This is a series of pictures being painted for us. And we are meant to take in as much through the watching as we are through the listening.

[3 : 1 1] Both are true. But we're actually meant to imagine these sorts of things. Remember I spoke about political cartoons? Well, this is sort of not a political cartoon, but a cartoon painted in heaven.

That is showing us images of what is actually going on. And we're meant to capture some of these images. So we watch. And as we do so, many different images are paraded before us.

But I want you to notice the focus of the things that will be seen. You see, the Lord himself tells us what that focus will be. Look at verse 1. And the Lord says, come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.

So the Lord himself is opening this door to heaven for us. He's giving John and us a peek into heaven. And he's showing us together the future. But notice the thrust.

It is not what might take place. It is not what will take place. Rather, it is what must take place.

[4 : 13] You see, these things must take place because God has purposed them in history. You see, it's not might. It's not will.

It is must. That is, they must take place in God's world as it opens up. And the center of these things is the actions that were focused in the Lord Jesus.

That is, in his birth, in his life, in his death, in his birth, in his life, in his death, in his exaltation. And because of Jesus, these things are now a necessity, you see.

Because of what Jesus had accomplished, because of what he had done, these things are now a must. This must take place, given what has happened. And these things must take place.

Because God's great plans have Jesus as their goal, their center, and their end. And here he is, showing them to us in person.

[5 : 11] Friends, I wonder if you remember the outline I gave you for this book. Do you remember all of those scenes of heaven, and then earth, and a peek into heaven again, and then earth again, a peek into heaven again, and then earth again.

And when combined, they paint this magnificent portrait of God, and of his purposes in his world. Now, friends, remember what John told us that Jesus had said?

John told us that Jesus was going to tell us about what must take place after this. However, you know what is striking? What is interesting is that the picture we are presented with is not what most Christians want to see.

You see, what do we Christians want to see? What do we want to see from the book of Revelation? We want to see mysteries, secrets, timelines, deadlines. But instead, what do we see?

Here we are, the beginning of this great revelation. What are we going to be shown? God. We think, hang on a moment. Do I have to wait another chapter or two before I get to the stuff I really want to see?

[6 : 15] You see, we see God on his throne. Royal, majestic, sovereign. And if John wants us to know what must take place after this, what must he tell us?

Who's in charge of what will take place after this? That's why he starts here. And the one in charge is God, seated on his throne. Ruling, determining, overseeing.

Whatever the future is, it is him who is in charge of it. Ruling it. Just as the son knows and oversees the church, so God oversees his world.

Friends, what a great comfort this is. Please understand it. You see, I want to stress this because of the way most people read Revelation. The godly do not fundamentally find security in knowing what's coming.

No. They find security in knowing who controls what's coming. The psalmist knew this. In this magnificent psalm, Psalm 121, he sings on behalf of all who go up to the temple to meet God.

[7 : 25] And what does he say? He says these words. I lift my eyes up to the mountains. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let my foot slip or your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber. Instead, he who watches over, indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

We need to hear this. It is very important to see many who read Revelation are looking for the wrong thing. They are looking for dates, times and locations. What God wants us to know is who he is.

What his interests are. And with that knowledge, no matter what comes, we will be ready for it. We will be equipped for any circumstance. Because it is he who is to be feared, not history.

Friends, we as Christians do not fear history. We fear God. And if we fear God and in the sense of knowing and loving and obey him, we need not fear history.

[8 : 30] But let's look further. I want you to notice what John says. You see, he doesn't see a likeness. No, this God is not one who can be represented by any human images. His likeness is simply like that of various colors here.

Rising out of precious stones and flashing through a strange rainbow cloud. Look at it with me.

Verse 3. John tells us, And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby, a rainbow that shone like an emerald encircling the throne.

You see, this God is so removed from humans that they cannot be allowed to see him face to face. But we scarcely have time to reflect on this when we notice that there's some other people who we can identify.

There are 24 thrones and seated on them 24 elders. These strange figures. These strange figures sit in their own thrones. Dressed in white robes.

With golden crowns on their heads. Remember? Picture it. And then from the throne come flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder.

[9 : 34] And in front of the throne there burn seven flaming torches. And a sea of glass as clear as crystal stretches out before the throne. And finally, around the throne we then notice there are four living creatures covered with eyes.

One looks like a lion. The second like an ox. The third has the face of a human being. And the fourth resembles a flying eagle. Each of them has wings and each of them has a mouth.

And together they represent all created and living creatures. That is, not just humans. But the animate world as well. In unison, they representing all creation sing day and night in praise of the one who sits on the throne.

Together they praise the one who existed before all time. And who will continue to exist long after time ceases to exist, as it were. Look at what they say in verse 8. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

And then as the song goes on, we notice that the 24 elders fall flat on their face. They worship this creator God who lives forever and ever.

[10 : 48] And they cast their crowns before his throne and join in praising the one who created all things. Look and listen to them in verse 11. They say, you are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power.

For you created all things. By your will they were created and have their being. But what does all this mean? Why the pictures and why the images?

Why the characters? Well, I think it is clear. You see, you use images, don't you, when you cannot use anything else. You use images when you cannot use anything else.

Images are a great way of describing the indescribable. They are ways of talking about the sort of God who cannot be represented by any human images. That is, he's a God who is totally other than us, totally removed from us, totally different from us.

He is pure, majestic, powerful, faithful to his promises, the keeper of covenants, the God of judgment and the God of all mercy.

[11 : 55] But above all of this, who is he? He's the God who made this world, the creator of all. And we are now in his throne room before him. But the passage is not simply designed to explain the character of God.

It's designed to draw us in. You see, here is a God to respond to, to fear, to be in awe of, to be attracted to. Here is a God enthroned.

He rules over all. What matters is not what happens around the world. What matters is who oversees it all. And so we're drawn with the elders and the living creatures.

And as we watch, we cannot help ourselves. That's how this is designed to function. We find ourselves joining in with all creation in verse 11. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being. But let's return to the passage. You see, we've only got halfway through the story for tonight. We've seen one thing in the courtroom, but there's more to come.

[13 : 03] Let's watch the scene some more. For as all of heaven bows down and worships the creator, worships the creator God, something happens.

Look at chapter 5 verse 1. Look at what happens. The hand of the almighty God stretches out. And John sees that in it lies a scroll.

It's a scroll that has writing on both sides. That is, both sides of the parchment. And it is sealed with seven seals. That is, it's got these little sort of seals that are plugged in to keep only certain parts of the scroll able to be open in certain sections.

If you lived in John's world of emperors, you'd probably guess that this scroll bound some sort of imperial decree. And here is the emperor, well, greater than that, the God of all the earth, holding a scroll with his own, as it were, imperial decree.

That is, if you'd seen this with an emperor, you'd expect that this is the will of the emperor for his people. But it's not only packed full of his will written on both sides.

[14 : 13] It is also, as I said, completely sealed. In other words, it's a will of God that is inaccessible. Well, that is what John sees.

You see, what John sees is not an emperor, but, of course, the God of all the earth, greater than all emperors. And the scroll packed full and completely sealed undoubtedly contains the secret plans and purposes of this God of all the earth.

And our curiosity wells up within us, doesn't it? What are those plans of the creator God? What is he about in his world?

What is his hidden mind on the world and his future for it? Where is history headed? That's what we want to know. And if we don't know this, what hope have we got?

We'll be lost in this world. So we wonder, how will history work itself out? And is there anyone who can open those seals so that we can get a glimpse into it?

[15 : 11] For we long to have a peek inside. We yearn to read the scroll. And so we cry out to the angelic beings or with the angelic beings in verse 2.

Who is worthy then? Who's worthy to break the seals and to open that scroll? Who's worthy to know and unlock the secret purposes of God? And who's deserving enough to execute the hidden plans of the almighty God of all the earth?

Who can do such a thing as that? Who could take that scroll and pick the seals off it? We look around. And the courtroom looks around.

And a search is engaged in and no one is found. Look at verse 3. No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth can be found to open those seals. And in verse 4, the apostle John, knowing the lostness of the world and not being able to know where God is heading, weeps bitterly on our behalf.

For like us, he knows the importance of this scroll. And like us, he knows that it needs to be opened. And then a voice booms out through the quarter in verse 5. Do not weep. See, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed.

[16 : 22] He's able to open the scroll and its seven seals. And all of that seems so appropriate, doesn't it? After all, we've heard of the great King David, the famous Israelite king. We know this lion descended from Judah.

Who could be better than the descendant of Judah and the descendant of David? Who could be better? So we look around. You can imagine in our minds eagerly scanning the courtyard for this lion.

But our eyes alight on no king of beasts. There's no flowing mane. No fierce eyes. No frightening roar.

No flashing teeth. No, all we can see is a lamb. Imagine from that to that. A lamb. It's about small and vulnerable.

It's about as far as you can get from a lion, isn't it? In fact, a lion would just eat it up. Friends, our translation is not as helpful here as it might be. For verse 6 literally reads, So standing as though it had been slain.

[17 : 41] Can you see the strangeness of this language? Surely if a lamb has been slain, how could it be standing? It doesn't work.

And how do you tell that a lamb has been slain? Well, you probably see that its throat has been slit. But that is, there are signs of blood around its throat.

Now, we're therefore to think of a Passover lamb and a death that redeems, aren't we? A lamb who has died. However, it's standing. It's therefore not as dead as it should be.

In fact, it's very much alive. And it stands in the center of the throne with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the world. Horns in the Old and New Testaments are symbols of strength, courage and might.

Seven of them implies fullness. Perfection even. So here is one full of might. A weak lamb who is perfect in power. Seven eyes and seven spirits pick up various Old Testament allusions.

[18 : 45] And the seven eyes convey notions of perfect or full sovereignty and omniscience. That is, you've got seven eyes. You can see anywhere, can't you? And see everything. The seven spirits are the seven spirits of God already mentioned earlier on in Revelation.

They convey the fullness of God's spirit in Jesus. Can you see how the imagery piles upon each other? Here he stands in the throne room. That's a humble, sacrificed lamb.

And yet he has all the signs of being immensely grand, occupying a position of prominence. And so we begin to wonder, can this lamb be the lion that we're looking for?

And then our suspicions are confirmed because the lamb advances. He approaches the throne as lion and lamb. And the God who is holy holds no fear for him.

And so he goes up to the God who is holy. And he marches up to that throne of the holy and majestic creator of all the earth, before whom all creation has bowed in chapter four.

[19 : 52] And with fearlessness, he takes the scroll from the hand of him who sits on the throne. And when it takes place in verse eight, can you see it?

The beasts and the 24 elders, they're overwhelmed by this. They fall flat on their faces before the lamb. And the courtroom sings with their praise. Verse nine. You, you are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain.

And with your blood, you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you've made them to be a kingdom and priest to serve our God. And they will reign on the earth.

And the court just blossoms into praise. Thousands and thousands of angelic voices join in. Ten thousand times, ten thousand angels burst into song and together they praise the lamb.

Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise. Can you hear the parallel to chapter five?

[20 : 58] You see, worship is given to the lamb as well as to the creator. And if that weren't all enough, then all creation, just like previously, starts up every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, spurs the song into crescendo.

As they say to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb. Be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever.

They are bound together. Friends, what does all this mean? What do these symbols mean? What is the passage about?

What on earth and in heaven does it have to say to us today? Well, let me be bold and tell you that I think the message is magnificently clear. It tells us that the power to stand, the power to stand and take the scroll.

To break its hard set seals. To release and execute the plans of God, the things that must happen. Belongs to one alone. Belongs to Jesus Christ who has been sacrificed.

[22 : 10] To Jesus who's overcome the power of death. Belongs to the Christ who has paid the ransom for human sin through his willing shedding of his blood. To the one who alone has enabled humans to enter into heaven.

The one and this one alone has given humans boldness to approach the living creator God who would otherwise be unapproachable. But there's more, friends.

This sneak into heaven has told us something else profound. It has told us that whatever else happens in the world from here on, we should recognize that the most critical moment has already happened.

Let me repeat it. It tells us that whatever else is going to happen in the world, we should recognize that the most critical moment has already happened. It is already in the past.

It is already accomplished. So our focus as we face the future is not to be on fear and worry. You see, if we have put our trust in the lion from the tribe of Judah, who's also the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, then we do not need to fear.

[23 : 18] He holds the scroll. He controls the future. Friends, if you like, being a Christian is like this. It's walking backwards into the future. With our eyes fixed closely on that which happened there.

That incarnation, that death. If we fix our eyes there, then like the psalmist in 121, we can march into the future. But more so than the psalmist in 121 could ever do.

Because we know where history is grounded. We know that it is not random from here on in. We know that it flows out of here. And the most important thing that you will ever face in the future is in the past.

But there's one more thing. Do you remember the constant refrain about overcoming or being victorious to the letters of the churches? Do you remember that? To him who overcomes or to him who is victorious, I will.

Do you remember Jesus saying those words all the way through those letters? Well, look at chapter 5, verse 5. We're told that the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed.

[24 : 27] Same word. Has been victorious. Has overcome. The Greek word here is the same one as used in the letters to the churches. And this is what true triumph, true victory looks like.

It is achieved by what? Humble obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross. Humble obedience by faithful self-sacrifice.

But there's more. We conquer as we live by and through that sacrifice. Friends, we depend on the lamb. We follow the lamb. Do you want to know how to overcome, how to be victorious?

Well, be like him. Be like him. Friends, we live in a world of mighty world powers. We have America that represents itself with a huge eagle.

France is a tiger. Britain is a lion. Russia is a bear. China is a dragon. We have a world of massive forces that seem destructive and out of control. And into that world of awesome, devastating power, there comes a message about another animal.

[25 : 34] It's not the one you and I would choose. It's a lamb. And its message is so different from the nations of the world, isn't it? There are no computers, no technological mastery, no tanks, no smart bombs, no enormous armies, no ravenous powerful beasts, no...

The Christian gospel has a lamb with its throat slit, who's standing. With his throat ripped open by our world with its devastating power.

But who is still standing and will be standing long after the nations that ripped his throat open have gone. A lamb victorious.

And that is the centre of the Christian message. And it tells us that truth and security is not found in technology and strategy and brute strength. It's not found in smart bombs and tanks and nuclear arsenals and computer operated machinery.

Truth, wisdom, security and power finds its true focus elsewhere. It finds its true meaning in the foolishness and weakness of a man hanging on a cross.

[26 : 44] Truth, wisdom, security and power.

No body. No dead Messiah. No stench of death. All they could smell was the fragrance of life. And as the truth dawned on them in the following days, and as their eyes lifted up, and as they actually had glimpses of him in person, they looked beyond the shame of the cross.

And they saw that in the cross and the resurrection God had triumphed. And he proclaimed his triumph. They realised that in the cross a battle had been fought.

A battle against the enemies of sin, death and the devil. And that battle had been won convincingly, surely. Sin was conquered. Death was vanished. Satan was overturned.

And they had a living Lord to prove it. No one could see it but them. But they knew. And they knew that sooner or later the whole world would know. And they knew that one day the whole world would bow before the Lamb who had conquered all that was worth conquering.

[28 : 18] Friends, as you look around the world today, as you see the world, as you think about your own life, I want you to do so with a heavenly perspective. Friends, you see, we live in a world that loves power, strength and vitality.

It's entranced by might. But the reality is that this world is caught in the grip of an epidemic. Of massive proportions. It is caught in sin.

And without the message of the Lamb, the people of this world will have to face God without him.

And without the Lamb, they have no hope.

Without the Lamb, there is no future. Without the Lamb, they will have to face God on their own.

And without the Lamb, facing God will be a terrifying prospect.

For without the Lamb, they will be banished from God's presence forever. They'll be excluded from everything good that he has and could shower upon them.

[29 : 28] Friends, God's purpose in the world is in the hands of his Son. Don't worry about it. He knows it.

He's overseeing it. He's unlocking them one by one. The destiny of every individual on this planet is related to their attitude to him.

Not to anything else. Our destiny is not related to anything but that. And if you're a Christian, you have decided to line up with this. You've decided to give your life to announcing the weak but strong message of a Lamb who looks slain but is in reality standing.

So will you line up with the Spirit of God as well? And will you take on the task of the Bride? Of this Saviour?

Will you live as your Lord? Will you walk in the steps of the Lamb? Friends, God is looking toward a day when there will be a multitude from every nation gathered around his throne.

[30 : 35] A multitude from all tribes and peoples and languages. People is just standing before the throne and before the Lamb. Crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who's seated on the throne and to the Lamb.

And if you're a Christian, you're lining up with that. So will you go and announce that great news to the world? Will you follow the Lamb wherever he goes? That is the role of God's people, the Bride of Christ.

This is what the Holy Spirit is doing. Will you speak this great news to the world? Will you give them a sneak peek into heaven, as it were, to tell them where their destiny lies?

Will you invite people to hear about Jesus? Will you live in the likeness of Jesus? Will you join the Father, the Son, the Spirit and the Bride of Christ in making him known? Will you live in the selected■■ kopi go do you■■an in arena!!

Will you than... Will you do that for their name? If you're talking with Jesus... Will you come over again? Will you believe up Savior, behold you speaking in prefer... than Lord Terry... ...over as the Father's name... ...in stip or not... With me in hope insei... ...very... ...go romping to wa from .

[31 : 41] Thank you.