

Behold a door standing open in Heaven

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the first passage of Scripture that we read, the book of Revelation, chapter 4, reading again at verse 1.

After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven.

Amen. The Apostle John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos, and therefore excluded from the gatherings of the Lord's people.

He was there, we are told, on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. In other words, he was there because of his faith and his life dedicated to following the Lord Jesus.

The motive for placing him in such solitary exile was, I believe, to minimize the effect that he would have had on the Church.

[1 : 15] And yet is it not ironic that by sending John to Patmos, he has far more impact on the wider Church than he might have had, had he been left where he was.

For the Apostle John, Patmos, was a special and significant period in his life.

For the very wilderness of his exile proved for him to be the gate of heaven. And that is often how it is.

In the lives of men and women as they journey through life, those who are united to Christ through faith in his name, sometimes the very places where they're least expected are the places where God meets with them and blesses them and enriches their spiritual lives.

And that is what I believe happened to John and Patmos. It became for him the very gate of heaven.

[2 : 54] We are told that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day in the first chapter. He heard a voice and he saw. It was a time of spiritual uplift and spiritual refreshment, spiritual fellowship with the Lord.

And I think there are times in most, if not all, believers' lives where there are, for want of a better phrase, purple patches of spiritual fellowship and communion times when you look back, perhaps with deep yearning and longing to have recreated in your life.

Times where you experienced that enriching fellowship and communion where you might wish that it could be recreated again.

Times when the presence of the Lord was very real and very near to you. And so in the chapters that we read together, which I believe are pivotal to the book of Revelation, written at a time when the church was suffering terribly for its faith in Jesus and more suffering on the way.

These chapters are designed to help hurting Christians look beyond the strange, frequently perplexing, painful place of the realities of this world, to see God's greatness and God's glory and majesty and grace and seeing that, be strengthened and equipped to press on in the trials of life.

[4 : 55] It was at the end of the searching letters that John was commanded to write and send to the seven churches that he received this vision.

In that final letter that is sent, there is a word of encouragement given. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne.

That is, as it were, the call of Jesus to his people in the world, to conquer, to persevere, not to get sidetracked, not to be overcome, to press on towards the finishing line, to win the prize.

And so, where that instruction was given and that exhortation is given, you place that side by side, perhaps with your burdens, your hurts, your wounds.

You look at the sin that is still festering in your own heart, and you see the opposition of the world to the Christian.

[6 : 18] See a hostile culture around you. There is a fickle, rebellious heart within, and the command to conquer and overcome doesn't seem so easy, does it?

When you see what the opposition is, and it is just as you feel, as it were, your spiritual needs beginning to buckle under the weight of the call of Christ, you feel that there is no way that you can do this.

A door is opened in heaven, and a voice says, come up here, and I will show you what will take place after this.

How the believer shall overcome. How the believer shall conquer. And so I'd like just three brief points to highlight from our reading.

First of all, God's power. Secondly, God's purpose. And finally, the praise that is given to God. Firstly, God's power.

[7 : 46] Notice how John begins with his vision in this first verse of chapter 4. He speaks of an open door. Sometimes an open door can be very sinister because you don't know what is behind it.

May fill you with apprehension and fears, particularly if you don't expect a door to be open. Sometimes an open door can be an indication of welcome an indication that you are indeed welcomed in to the place where there is an open door.

John, when he saw this open door, you notice, he tells us, behold. And that word is highly significant in the book of Revelation.

It is the most frequent command that you will find in the book of Revelation. I wonder if you know what the next most common command is in the book of Revelation.

Well, if my reading is correct, I believe it is fear not. Behold and fear not. How will we obey the command to fear not in this strange, confused, bewildering, painful place in which we live?

[9 : 20] How will we face our present sufferings and our future trials? How shall we fear not? we'll do it by obeying the command to behold.

We silence fear by looking where John points us. God opens the door of heaven and tells John and tells us to behold.

What is it that we are to behold? And when John went beyond the open door, what he saw was a throne stood in heaven. Now, of itself, I do not believe for one moment that that would be of any consolation to John or to me and you.

An empty throne. Why? For the very good reason that an empty throne would suggest that there was a vacuum of power.

It would imply there had been an abdication by the ruler. We know how dangerous a power vacuum can be.

[10 : 43] But the vision that John saw was not just a throne, but an occupied throne. Behold, a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne.

And that is highly significant and hugely important. There is one seated on the throne. Good and well. But then the question arises in your mind.

Is the one on the throne competent to rule? Does the one on the throne have authority and power? Or is the one on the throne just a mere figurehead, a puppet on the throne?

And so you're waiting for a further disclosure in the vision that is given to John. And the disclosure maybe does not live up to your expectations.

He who sat there had the appearance of Jasper and Carnelian. Well, what are you going to make of that?

[11 : 53] Jasper and Carnelian? What does that tell you? You're almost tempted to shout out to John, is that the best you can come across with John?

And what I think comes across is the total inadequacy of words to describe the glory of the indescribable.

In other words, to set before us the glory of the one who occupies the throne and to be seated upon it.

We're not able to deduce a whole lot from John's description of the appearance of the one on the throne. All John can say is he's like precious stones.

He's like a diamond turning in the sun. He is dazzling in his beauty, captivating, breathtaking, in the splendor of his majesty.

[12 : 52] And the best John can do is communicate likenesses and comparisons that inevitably fail to do justice to the reality of the one who is seated upon this elevated throne.

It can only set before us that the person on the throne is in total, wholly incapable of description in language that we can understand.

understand. And therefore you have to conclude that the person on the throne can only be God.

Because God is not someone we can ever say that we wholly understand, or that we have the vocabulary to describe the majesty and the power of the almighty.

instead we're going to do with them as John suggests, we do with diamonds and precious stones. We adore the one who is in the throne.

We can't take our eyes from him, captivated by him. And if you are in Christ, you'll spend eternity.

The greatest delight of your heart will be to spend forever having your eyes filled with new views of the truth, of the glory, of this God.

[14 : 31] Oh, what a feast for everyone who is privileged to get to heaven. Endless expeditions of discovery and wonder in the beauty of God.

the Lord reigns. He has not abdicated his role or his rule. He has not defected from his position of sovereignty.

And although we may not always be able to grasp how this is so, John sets before us here, inviting us to lift our eyes from our circumstances and to see again the throne and the one seated upon it.

And the message is, as the prophet Jeremiah sets before us, our glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.

This glorious throne is the sanctuary of the believer in every age. Let us run to it, let us rest and cling in the vision of the greatness of God, whom John sets before our eyes.

[15 : 51] God in his sovereignty and in his mercy. Because if we do not believe that God reigns in sovereign power, then we are in danger of sinking into that vast, deep, deep ocean, that frightening, gloomy ocean of total despair.

And here John is demonstrating to us the hope of the church in every age that here is a sovereign God who sits on the throne.

And as the psalmist expresses it, the Lord reigns, let the earth be glad. Is there that element of gladness in my heart and yours this evening that God reigns?

Let distant shores express delight. Clouds and thick darkness cover him. His throne is built on truth and right.

And so John speaks of the reign of God. Around his throne, he says, was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. A rainbow. surely that sets before us something of the reminding us of the covenant promise of God.

[17 : 17] He will preserve the world so that it might be, as John Calvin puts it, the theater of God's glory, the venue for his saving work.

he preserves the world. God never forgets his covenant promise of mercy. He is constantly at work as the king of creation, ruling the elements from his throne, upholding and preserving and governing all his creatures as the shorter catechism reminds us in all their actions.

And before the throne, says John, not only was there this rainbow, but there was a sea of glass like crystal. And in the book of Revelation, you find that the sea is a symbol of danger.

It speaks of a threat. It is out of the sea that the beast appears. And so, in other places in the Bible, the sea is a symbol of chaos and constant movement.

But here in the vision, it is mirror calm before the throne of divine sovereignty and dominion. Chaos may appeal to reign in our world, but the Lord of creation rules over it all.

[18 : 54] The rainbow overhead, and the sea, millpond calm at the foot of the throne, are powerful reminders that God reigns.

And don't we need to be reminded of that day after day after day that God reigns, irrespective of the apparent chaos in the world in which we are passing through, to be reminded that God's purposes have been outwards, and that he reigns.

He sits on the throne, governing all things, working all things according to the counsel of his will.

And then he describes the, goes on to describe the servants of God and their actions.

They adore God for his holiness. They adore him for his power. Holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.

They adore him for his immutability, his unchangeability, his unchangeableness, the Lord God almighty who was and is to come. That's the song of the living creatures.

[20 : 07] Are they perhaps there to represent all the creatures that God has made and over whom he continues to rule? And the reason the elders celebrate is for his work, particularly his creator,

what you created all things and by your will they existed and were created.

So the first point is to encourage the church God reigns, the power of God. Secondly, God's purpose and there is a shift of focus from the majesty of God to the purposes of God.

And it's as if you go from creation to redemption and there appears to be a very real problem, a problem that causes John to weep.

And remember this is a vision. And yet he is weeping in the vision. In the hand of God there is a sealed scroll.

Nothing said about what is in it but you get a sense of the vital importance of the scroll being opened. and I'm sure in your reading of the book of Revelation you will have seen that the scroll is the program of history, worked out according to the design and the decree of the one who is seated on the throne, God's plan.

[21 : 37] And since no one is able to open the scroll, John is deeply distraught. Will the plan of God fail?

Will the church on earth suffering for the cause of Christ, will it be defeated, destroyed, left to the hatred of a rebellious defiant world?

And John weeps. And it's one of the most pionent moments in the whole of the Bible. John weeping.

you know, few things can inspire despair more quickly than the thought that the future holds no hope, that there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

And maybe you can relate to John here. He wept. and perhaps it would be good if we all knew something of this kind of weeping in our individual lives.

[22 : 54] Jesus laments over Jerusalem, oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and storms those who are sent to it. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hand-gatherer so it brood under her wing and you were not willing is the lament of Christ over the city of Jerusalem.

Peter wept over his own sin after he had denied the Lord. You remember he went out and he wept bitterly. Do we know something of that kind of weeping in our own individual lives?

The apostle Paul wept. He wept because some walked as enemies of the cross. He tells us in writing to the Philippians.

He speaks of great sorrow and unceasing anguish of heart because of the rejection of the Lord Jesus by his fellow Jews.

Well do we know something not just of weeping over our own individual sins and our shortcomings but do we know something of weeping for the lost?

[24 : 09] do we love our fellow sinners in the world so much that we weep over them in order to bring them to Jesus Christ that they might indeed come to share in the same covenantal blessings that you and I have experienced through faith in Christ.

Christ. And you know no one notice what is said.

It's not that he was looking for someone who was strong enough to open the scrolls that were sealed but no one worthy was found to open the sealed scroll.

God how would the plan of salvation be known? And in his desolation of grief John is given wonderful consolation by one of the elders as if the elder is saying to John John you're not seeing the whole picture and he points him to Christ.

Weep no more he says 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. Do not weep. Christ has conquered.

[25 : 36] Do not despair. Do not give up even though your corruptions are strong and your enemies are mighty and you seem to be making little progress in the path of grace.

The question is not of your own strength because you have none but the implication of the shed blood and the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Do not weep. Face of overwhelming trial trouble heartache and affliction every one of them is written in the scroll in the right hand of the one seated on the throne as part of thee. process that is required for your refining and mine.

Oh, it can be very painful to be in the refiner's fire. It can be extremely painful and unpleasant to be in that crucible until he sees his own image reflected in your life, made perfect.

[27 : 02] Difficult for us to understand that when we pass through trial, that it is for our good and for our sanctification and for our being made perfect in him.

So here you are in the last book of the Bible and the way back in the very first book of the Bible you find this. Judah is a lion's calf. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion and the lion, as everyone knows, is invariably a symbol of strength, of power.

And the attention is drawn away as it were, from the sealed scroll to the lion king. The one who has conquered is not just the lion of the tribe of Judah, but the root of David.

We are used to hearing of Jesus as David's son according to the flesh. But that's not what is said here. But Jesus has the root of David.

In words, as the one who precedes David, as David's Lord, the root of David. You remember how that was such a difficult one for the Jewish people to sort out?

[28 : 31] And how Jesus tested them and tested their Old Testament knowledge. God and here there is reference to the root of David, the one who precedes David, the one from whom David himself comes rather than from whom the Lord comes.

And it's classic messianic language. And you notice as John follows the instructions of the elder. You might expect him to see a lion king.

And no, that's not what he sees. Between the throne, he says, and the four living creatures among the elders, I saw a lamb.

I saw a lamb. What a contrast. The expectation is that he's going to see a powerful figure, and he sees a lamb.

And in some ways, this takes you right back into Old Testament teaching, right back to the book of Genesis 2, right back to Mount Moriah, where Abraham and Isaac, ascended Mount Moriah and Isaac, poses the question, where is the lamb?

[30 : 05] for a burnt offering. And you remember the response of faith from Abraham, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

My son, God, will provide. And that answer has echoed and re-echoed down through succeeding generations, down through the unfolding of revelation in the sacrificial lambs used and offered up by the people of Israel, directing us ultimately to the one of whom John the Baptist cries and draws attention to with evangelical seal, as the one who is illuminated by the Holy Spirit, behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And now, in this vision, a consoled, tearful John sees the lamb right at the epicenter of the heavenly court, surrounded by the vast company of heaven's angels.

He's been the only one who is worthy to open the scroll. He is not the defeated lamb, but the victorious lamb.

And in John's day and in hours, when the gospel is held in contempt, when Christians face mockery and disdain for their confidence in biblical truth, death, we need to cling to this clear picture of the reigning lamb, the victorious, conquering lamb, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered.

[32 : 14] The lamb, the omniscient, lamb, the powerful lamb, and that is all set before us in symbolic terms, from the way he is described to us, with the seven horns and the seven eyes and so on, speaking of the power and the omniscience of the lamb.

He is the victor. And so, that is the message, basically, of the book of Revelation. God's redemptive purposes accomplished because the lamb wins.

Surely, there is good news in the face of every trial. How was the victory won? I saw a lamb standing. as though it had been slain.

How does Jesus come to triumph? Does he not triumph through the sufferings and death of the cross? How does he fulfill the Father's plan?

Does he not fulfill it by dying for sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation? And surely that is what brings comfort to sinners like you and me?

[33 : 44] That the lion is the lamb, that the king went to the cross, that the Lord of life still bears the marks of his death for us, the emblems of his love for you and for me if we be in Christ.

The marks of his devotion to your salvation and eternal security, glory. They are indelibly etched in the now glorified flesh of the Lord Jesus, your Redeemer.

Visible yet in glorified in his glorified body. What do they say to us? Do they not say this?

God did not spare his own son, but give us up for us all. How? How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

When you come to Jesus, it is as to the Lord, to a lamb standing as the slain, who is bought and paid for all that you need, who has already purchased every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, who suffered in your room and your place, who died your death, who purchased your pardon, who pleads your cause.

[35 : 49] All the wounds of Christ are highly significant, wounded for your transgressions, bruised for your iniquities, crushed. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his wounds we are healed, so that broken and wounded lives are healed through the wounding of Christ.

God reigns but the time is gone and then there is praise offered to God. You see as he comes to take the scroll, it's almost as if a tsunami wave of praise erupts and begins to radiate outward from the epicenter around the throne.

First the elders begin to sing, worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals for you were slain. And as that tsunami wave as it proceeds ever outward from the throne there's an innumerable company of angels take up the refrain worthy is the lamb who was slain.

Till finally that tidal wave of adoration sweeps up within it every creature in heaven and on earth and the sea and they adore the Lord in wonder and in praise.

Oh has that tsunami wave of adoration touched your life has it touched your heart has it caught you up so that you too are singing in your praise to the one who is in the midst of the throne let us pray