

# The Throne of God and the Lamb - Morning Service

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 16 October 2016

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[ 0 : 0 0 ] As we stand, let us pray. Father in heaven, we pray for the gift of your Holy Spirit this morning as we hear your word. We pray that your word will be that living word that you have given to us, changing us, transforming us, bringing us to repentance and to a vision of your love and your power and your goodness for us, that we might worship you with all that we are and all that we have.

In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Please be seated. Well, we're continuing our series on the book of Revelation. And if you remember, if you've been at all of our previous sermons in the series, we've been hearing about letters to the churches.

And we are hearing that it's sort of a grim reality. There's signs of life in those churches, but there's also many flaws in them as well.

And some of the flaws are that they've lost their initial love for God. Many are practicing immorality, the morality of the world around them.

Many are putting up with teaching that compromise with the world. They're asleep towards God. They lack zeal. And the last one that we heard about, Laodicea, Jesus writes to them and says, For you say I'm rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that in fact you're actually wretched and pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

[ 1 : 3 9 ] In other words, they are spiritually poor. Jesus, he says he's outside of the church and he's knocking on the doors of people's hearts so that he can come in, so they can know the living presence of Jesus and be with him in close friendship.

And to just about every church he says, repent. He is calling for a change in their relationship to God. And so that's where we've come so far in a nutshell.

You didn't have to listen to all those sermons, right? But what happens in this chapter, in these two chapters that we just heard, is a massive change takes place in the scene.

And it is absolutely key for the rest of the book of Revelation, for the whole Bible, and for all of us today as well. You know, when you hear about those churches, you wonder, Is God in control of his churches?

What is going on with them? Why can't he make them to be these great centers of blessing to the whole world where there aren't these kinds of flaws and problems in there? Has he given up on his church?

[ 2 : 4 6 ] And the answer is a resounding no. Because in nearly every letter, Jesus says that he is the one with great authority. That's how he starts every letter, in different ways.

And he calls his people to change their way to relate to God. He calls them to renew their love. He calls them to strengthen their zeal for Jesus and their faithful serving of Jesus in the world.

And that call to repentance is striking, not only because of its authority, but also because of the great love with which Jesus calls them to it.

He says to the church in Laodicea, Those whom I love, I reprove and I discipline. So be zealous and repent. And so I think this is a call for us today as we enter this chapter.

I wonder if he is calling you and our own church of St. John's to renewal, to repentance in our own lives.

[ 3 : 55 ] Those first three chapters of Revelation really search us. They search our hearts and our lives. And they ask us, How is your love and your zeal towards God?

Do you need Jesus to renew your heart and your mind? Does his truth form what you say and what you do? Are you sleepy towards Jesus?

And that's a tough thing to ask somebody at a 9 o'clock a.m. service. Are you sleepy towards Jesus? Are we as a church asleep? Well, as we think about those questions, chapters 4 and 5 are crucial for us because it shows that God renews his flawed church over and over again.

And he renews that church, he renews us by a vision, a glorious vision of himself. And it is a vision about ultimate reality, about the larger context that every person and every church lives in.

In fact, every person, whether they know God or not, lives in the context of this ultimate reality. And it is a gift to the church to see it.

[ 5 : 16 ] Because what that vision does is it reorients us to God. It changes the hearts of people who see that vision. It changes hearts of people who wander away from his love and who are not as zealous for his glory.

So I want us today to turn to chapter 4, verse 1 in Revelation, page 1030. Because in this vision, we go from earth into heaven.

And the opening words are critical for us. It says, Behold, a door standing open in heaven. And there's this voice of this mighty angel saying, Behold, come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.

And what we need to see here is that heaven is God's sphere of reality. It is not something that is far away. That is a concept that is distant.

It is right here, close beside us. In a real sense, we are moving alongside heaven. That it is always touching, it is intersecting with our ordinary lives.

[ 6 : 36 ] It is like a door, this is what we are seeing here, a door that can open right before us, right next to us. The Russian cosmonauts in the 1960s misunderstood this.

Because when they first went up to space, they said, they came back and they said, We went up to space, and we didn't see God. We were in the heavens. Didn't see God.

He does not exist. And at least one humorist said, Well, if they had just taken off their oxygen tanks, they would have seen him very, very quickly. And certainly, as we look into what we normally cannot see in our world, we see that fundamental truth in verse 2, in this heaven that is right near us.

And that is, Behold, a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne. And very simply, this is the truth that changes everything.

At the heart of the universe, there is a throne. And there is a living occupant of that throne. It is God, who himself actively rules all things in this universe.

[ 7 : 54 ] And his reality surrounds everything about this universe and our lives. He decides what will happen. And it happens. He hasn't given up on his church, this ruler of the universe.

He hasn't disowned all those whose hearts are far away from him, who are lukewarm towards him. And he hasn't forsaken this world that is around us. His will is what must take place, this vision says.

And he has the authority to make that happen. If you remember one thing from this passage, may it be that scene, that God is on his throne.

That scene, that vision, was vitally important for the early Christians to see because they constantly saw the splendor of Rome and Greece around them.

The splendor of their religions that could really easily influence and intimidate any person. Because immense wealth was associated with the idols that were worshipped.

[ 9 : 04 ] And Caesar's power was awesome. Far greater than anything we see in the world right now. The whole known world was ruled by Caesar.

And they built, the Romans built beautiful cities. In fact, we see vestiges of it now. They built temples and statues that all spoke to the glory of Rome and their gods.

The Greek religions were represented by beautiful people and the most impressive temples that were the wonders of the world and would absolutely amaze us today if we saw them intact and new were defined that religion.

It was awesome and impressive. Years ago, on our honeymoon, Catherine and I went to Athens as part of our honeymoon and we saw the Parthenon which is dedicated to the goddess Athena.

It is beautiful if you have seen it in life. And it is incredibly impressive structure today even by our standards.

[ 10 : 13 ] And even though it is in ruins and you can imagine and I looked at that and thought what would this have been looking like if it was brand new, gleaming, white, with all the gold, dominating the land for many, many miles around.

You see, from the world's perspective, the God of the Bible could not even come close to comparing to that kind of glory and beauty.

beauty. And certainly for us, we can be deeply impressed by the marvelous and good things that we people can come up with by political power, by beautiful celebrities, by institutions that are built to last like universities or hospitals or successful corporations and businesses.

But this vision tells us there is much more to reality than this because none of those things can compare to the beauty and the power and the goodness of God on the throne.

Look at verses three and following. In that vision, which can't be really expressed by words, we have to use symbols and I hope these symbols don't intimidate or confuse.

[ 11 : 31 ] They're actually quite straightforward. He had the appearance of the one on the throne of Jasper and Carnelian. That's saying that there were two precious, beautiful gems of that time.

They are symbolizing for John the precious and magnificent beauty that can't be described in words. And around the throne there is a rainbow, a beautiful sign of God's merciful commitment to creation.

And it's in the context of that beautiful commitment to bring his goodness into the world. That there is flash, there's a flash of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder.

The terrible beauty of God's perfect, holy judgment of all things. And all of that powerful beauty is reflected and magnified by this pure, glassy sea that you see.

It's a magnificent scene. And it's as though his beauty and the goodness of who God is gathers all living creation around the throne.

[ 12 : 42 ] And so we see here that there are 24 elders with crowns. And that 24 is a number that almost certainly is the 12 tribes of Israel, the old people of God, and the 12 apostles who represent the new redeemed people of God, of Jesus.

And together they symbolize all the people of God before and after Jesus came to die and rise again. They are gathered around the throne. The rest of creation is there, the goodness of it.

The four living creatures symbolize the four corners of the earth, the whole inclusive world. world.

And what you see is that creation in all of its glory. You know, the lion is the nobility of creation, the ox is the strength, the eagle is that swift movement, the face of man is wisdom.

And all that is great and good in creation, what John is seeing, is worshiping in the one on the throne. And he says in that song that you see in verse 8, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty who was and is and is to come.

[ 13 : 58 ] You see, they are worshiping God because he is perfectly holy and good. He is all powerful. And that combination is something that you will never ever find in earth in those who exercise power in the world.

You will never see that goodness and purity and holiness combined with absolute power. power. And if you don't believe me, anyone following the current presidential campaign of the most powerful nation on earth can see it perfectly demonstrated.

That holiness and power don't come together in this world. I saw an ad in one of the subways that had, it was an ad for tissues, for Kleenex.

It had a woman crying big tears down her face as she's thinking, who do I vote for? Who do I vote for? And the tissues come to the rescue.

But you see, this song says that God is perfectly holy, he is perfectly mighty, and he is on the throne, he always was, he is, and always will be.

[ 15 : 15 ] That God surrounds all life and time, which means he is the only one who could create this world and all that is in it. That which is most powerful and most beautiful that we can see or imagine on this earth cannot come close to the power, the beauty, and the goodness of the one who created all of those things.

And that's why at the end of chapter four, creation gives thanks to God continually. and it's like this concert where there's antiphonally singing and acting, and you see creation giving thanks to God continually in concert with the twenty-four elders of the people of God adoringly casting their crowns before God.

It is a joyful sort of worship, an adoration, and they sing worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honor for you created all things.

That's why he is worthy. And by your will they existed and were created. That is the song of all songs. The one that always has been sung and always will be sung.

Here we see at the center of heaven, God himself gathering people and all living creatures around himself. And that reality is greater than every issue in your life.

[ 16 : 46 ] any shortcomings that you experience, any insecurities that you know. It means that God himself created you and you were not made by accident.

There is this deep purpose for your life that is being shown here in this vision. God is gathering you to be with him, to know his beauty and his holiness, his power and his goodness and his love.

Your creation, the fact that you were created is an act of deep love and kindness that you will thank God for eternally because it has meant that you were created for him.

That is awesome truth. But the goodness of God goes even deeper as the vision goes on in chapter 5 because he not only creates and sustains all things, but he redeems it as well.

So look at chapter 5. Something captures John's attention in chapter 5 verse 1. It is a scroll and it has seven seals which is the number of completeness.

[ 17 : 57 ] That is our last number we have to deal with. A number of perfection of the essence of God. And John knew that it was God's word therefore, that it reveals his good purposes for a creation that John knows is deeply flawed, that needs healing.

But there is deep pain in heaven as John cries uncontrollably in verse 4. And he cries, why? Because there is no one worthy to open that scroll, to reveal what the purposes of God are for his creation.

And when I read that I thought, why such an extreme reaction? It is a contrast because in the joy of heaven, here is the pain of weeping by John.

Well, it's because, it is because John knows the pain of this creation. He knows the reality of sin and suffering in this world.

He understands the messiness of our private lives. And he knows that we need renewal and we need new life. So he longs to see the good that God will do in his creation.

[ 19 : 12 ] And God wipes away John's tears in verse 5 by saying, weep no more. The lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered.

He can open that scroll. And you know, John turns and he expects to see that kind of lion, a powerfully conquering figure. But what does he see instead?

As we go on, what does he see? He sees a lamb standing with the elders as though he was slain, as though he was killed.

And it has seven horns and seven eyes. That shows us you can't actually draw this picture. It is a symbol. Horns are a symbol of power for kings.

And it's about complete and perfect power. And the seven eyes are a symbol of Jesus being all knowing. And what we see here is that the weakness and sacrifice and death of this lamb Jesus comes with absolute power and absolute knowledge.

[ 20 : 17 ] And there you have the paradox of the gospel beautifully shown to us in that symbol. Because Jesus' weakness and death means that he rules with absolute power.

power. It turns the values of the world right upside down. So that the hatred of men crucifying the lamb means that God's love and his life is poured out onto all people.

And they know the absolute goodness of God as a result. So you see God's purposes for all of creation are perfectly and powerfully carried out by Jesus, the lamb who was slain.

And that's why the lamb takes the scroll in verse 7. Now the question for us is why is he worthy? Why is that lamb worthy to carry out and make known God's plan for the world?

Well there's a new song in verse 9 in heaven. It is new because the lamb has created a completely new reality for people.

[ 21 : 25 ] Look at verse 9. You are worthy, they sing, because 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 of priests to our God and they shall reign on earth.

Now this is a powerful song for us because it tells us that Jesus is worthy to fulfill God's purpose because his death ransomed us.

That word ransom is important for us because what it describes is a slave whose freedom is bought with a price. And in ancient times the more valuable the slave the higher the ransom.

And what this song reveals to you and I is that the price of the ransom was the precious lamb of God. The price was God's beloved son who was slain for us and for our forgiveness.

And we are then able to see how utterly precious that you and I are to God. We see our value to God.

[ 22 : 41 ] He knows that our greatest good is to bring us into the life of heaven, to know him in all his goodness, in all his power, beauty and holiness, to simply adore him and worship him.

And Jesus' life buys that freedom for us. That is the good news. That is how precious we are to God.

And to know that is the way of renewal for us. It is the way that we can abandon ourselves, heart, mind and soul, to that one who has ransomed us, who has bought us at a price.

Because that truth tells us that you are precious to God, bought at the price of Jesus, and therefore that Jesus is worthy of your worship and all of your affections in every sphere of your life.

And we are drawn to that goodness. We are drawn to who God is. It is an odd thing that we have. There is almost a conflict that happens within us.

[ 23 : 48 ] Where, like the Israelites who are wandering in the desert, we can be oddly drawn back to the life of slavery as well. There are things in our life that can displace our affection for Jesus.

We are led away from the goodness of the true worship of God and towards spiritual death, slavery. We are bound to lose our zeal for God's glory and our love for Jesus will cool if our affections are placed on other things primarily.

And what happens then is that we will not serve with power. And instead, we are more and more overcome by the cares of the world. We forget we are precious to God. And things that don't have anything to do with the greatness and goodness and holiness of God become the things that we love and cherish.

but these chapters reorient and refocus our lives because they show us that real life is lived in relationship to Jesus who is worthy of our worship and our love.

He is the one who knows the messiness of our lives. He alone redeems. He alone frees us in his love to know our preciousness to God and to worship him.

[ 25 : 10 ] And I want to close by saying that there is a deep effect on our lives that happen. It is not just that our hearts are changed towards God.

It is that we walk into a role of being priests for God, which is an amazing thing that's said in this passage. And to be a priest is somebody who represents Jesus to the world.

And the way that we represent him best is if our affections are completely focused on this one who has ransomed us. This clear vision of Jesus' worthiness fills our hearts and minds and puts our affection for power or wealth or wisdom or honor and glory that the world offers and transfers those affections back to him.

So that we say with many angels and millions of people in verse 12, worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

It's a remarkable scene. It's a remarkable song. And the scene ends this chapter with, in an amazing way, Jesus joining the holy, powerful God that we saw on the throne and that all creatures worship.

[ 26 : 33 ] He joins that God on the throne. throne. And they, all of creation, it says at the end of our chapter, says this, to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.

You see, that's the song that's meant to define our lives, that we worship Jesus as God the creator is worshiped. He is God the son. He is worthy of our worship.

He has ransomed us. And may we this morning know his goodness and the life of heaven as we worship him in all we do in our work, in our families, in our churches, and in our leisure times.

Because that is what we're praying when we say, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen. Amen.